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The gestural assembling of the selfie

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The gestural assembling of the selfie



by

Darren Gary Berkland

PhD

September 2021

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by

Darren Gary Berkland

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the University's requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2021



Certificate of Ethical Approval

Applicant:

Darren Berkland

Project Title:

The selfie as a postdigital gestural assemblage

This is to certify that the above named applicant has completed the Coventry University Ethical Approval process and their project has been confirmed and approved as Low Risk

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ABSTRACT

The research presented in this thesis is the result of looking at the mirror of the selfie more closely while paying particular attention to gesture.

The high-resolution touchscreen and front-facing camera of the contemporary smartphone create a mirror that allows individuals to see themselves in their device when it is held before them, creating an interface. This mirror ultimately resulted in a proliferation of digital, vernacular self-portraits commonly referred to as “selfies”. This thesis returns to the mirror of the selfie as a site of investigation.

It is posited that a myth of invisibility haunts this mirror which results in it being seen but simultaneously ignored, or, otherwise, present but not apparent. This can be evidenced in a demonstrable gap within the literature on the selfie. Although the selfie emerged as a popular mode of self-portrait photography between the years 2010 and 2015, and became an object of intense, widespread discussion, critical enquiry, and academic investigation, there is a paucity of commentaries on the role the mirror played in how various selfie components—high-resolution touchscreen, front-facing camera, and individual grasping the device—came to be organised. There is an abundance of literature on the motivations of the individual, the role of the mobile device, and the role of photography in terms of the selfie: all rigorously examined. But the mirror did not undergo the same critical and concentrated interrogation the other components did.

This thesis shows how something so present has become so invisible to so many individuals. It does so by demonstrating that the invisibility of this mirror is a result of gesture. Gesture is not defined as a symbolic movement of the body, rather a disposition of the individual through which body and device become organised. The invisibility of the mirror is shown to be created at the level of gesture, and, through their gesturing, an individual organises themselves within a volume of relations that requires this invisibility to operate. In terms of the vocabulary of critical theory, the gesture of the selfie results in a desubjectification in which the body becomes docile, yet the individual still believes themselves to be free. The unique contribution of this thesis is not positing that desubjectification occurs but demonstrating the process of this desubjectification.

Practically, this research evidences this through a cross-disciplinary reading of literature around the selfie; a reading grounded in critical theory and cultural studies. The first methodological consideration is that the mirror is an apparatus [*dispositif*]: apparatus not meaning technology (in this instance, the mirror), but the technology and its incumbent social, cultural, and political extensities. Following this, the mirror and the resultant selfie is examined as a site of gesture and these gestures are read in terms of phenomenologies of the body. The work conducted in terms of the apparatus and the work conducted in terms of phenomenology are synthesised through theories of assemblage and affect. Resultantly, the selfie is shown to be a gestural assemblage in which knowledges of the mirror, the device, the body, and the individual are all consolidated.

These findings will provide an appropriate background to build further research into the selfie, mobile cultures, and, more generally, researchers working in apparatus and assemblage theories in the broader context of cultural studies.

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1 INTRODUCTION: ON THE SELFIE AS A GESTURE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE MIRROR CREATED BY THE DEVICE

1.1 The importance of exploring the selfie as a gesture and how this gesture creates a subject

The research presented in this thesis is an examination of the relationship between the selfie and gesture through an interrogation of the mirror.

Gesture within this thesis is used in the (now obsolete) sense of to carry the body from the Latin *gerere* (to wield, bear, carry, see Varro, 1977, p. 245 cited in Agamben, 2000, pp. 56-57). It is a word that denotes a deportment or a bearing of a body, a way in which an individual conducts, presents or situates themselves. This is at odds with the narrower and more generalised linguistic definition of gesture denoting a symbolic or signifying movement of the body (such as a wave, a shrug of the shoulders, or a thumbs-up). The term gesture is not used in the sense of human-computer interaction (HCI) as a means of interacting with a computer (input movements such as a swipe or a tap of a mobile phone device¹ are referred to as gestures). Furthermore, diverging from extant selfie literature, to examine the selfie and gesture is not to define it as a picture of a movement of the body or “gestural image” (Frosh, 2015, 2019), or define it as a pose or “scene” witnessed by others (Ruchatz, 2018, p. 53), or define it as “a practice [...] that can send (and is often intended to send) different messages to different individuals, communities, and audiences” (Senft & Baym, 2015, p. 1589). Instead, in this thesis, to discuss the selfie and gesture is to examine how a relationship is created between an individual and an (image-producing) device *before* an image is captured.

To articulate this another way (familiar to researchers working within critical theory), gesture is a framework for understanding the relationship between a subject and an apparatus [*dispositif*]. The bearing of the subject within an apparatus requires a particular disposition on the part of the individual. To be subject to something is to carry the expectations of an apparatus—to prepare for the correct

¹ The terms “mobile phone”, “smartphone”, and “cell phone” will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis to refer to a mobile communications device. It is acknowledged that distinctions can be made between the terms within certain contexts, but such distinctions are not imperative to the central argument of this thesis. Also, the term “mobile device” will be used as a generalised term for all three.

methods of use, for example—and this can only be done if the body is articulated or expressed in a particular way. It is, for this reason, that gesture can be understood as a method in which a subject acts themselves out (Flusser, 2014, p. 127), allowing for the dominant strategies of the apparatus to be “endured and supported” (Agamben, 2000, p. 56) through situatedness of the body. In becoming subject to an apparatus, a specific gesture is required by the individual, and therefore the capacities of the body are reduced. This critical vocabulary is central to this thesis and will be returned to in detail. For now, what is imperative to understand is that the term gesture is a method for describing the relationship between a subject and an apparatus. Therefore, to say the selfie requires a specific gesture is to say that the selfie is a relationship through which an individual becomes subject through how they situate themselves in relation to an image capturing device.

The aspect of the selfie that led to this conclusion is found in the arrangement of a mirror and a camera within a single device. It was a critical examination of this arrangement that led to these revelations regarding gesture. This research project endeavoured to extend and complement existing literature within selfie studies that examined how the body is given image through its discrete encounters with a mirror and a camera (notably Tiidenberg, 2014, 2015, 2016; Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015; Warfield, 2014a, 2014b, 2017a, 2017b; Warfield et al., 2016; Walker, 2005; Walker-Rettberg, 2014). However, it is posited within this thesis that these researchers have not treated gesture nor the mirror in required detail, resulting in a gap within some of their assessments, leading to a central problem in explanations of how an image of the body is produced by the selfie.

Before examining this literature in detail and illustrating the gap implicit within this corpus, specific methodological considerations are required for defining the selfie to outline the ontological parameters of the object of study of this thesis. Or, instead, try determine what a selfie is exactly.

1.2 Methodological considerations for defining the selfie as a quilting point with a history but no origin

Figure 1.1
Glitched selfie captured in Scotland



Note. Remembering Scotland. Selfie. #selfiesunday #everydayselfiesunday 📷 #glitch [photograph] by Berkland, 2019a, (<https://www.instagram.com/p/B2BuSLmnuzA/>)

A selfie is an image of an individual that is captured by themselves. It is conceivably a mode of self-portraiture. However, the particulars of this mode are generally discussed in terms of typical technologies or discussed under the auspice of a specific period. For example, the selfie is defined as an “*online* [emphasis added] self-portrait” (Schwarz, 2010, p. 163) or a self-portrait “shared with *an online audience* [emphasis added]” (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016, p. 127) and, as such, this mode of self-portraiture is associated with the networked infrastructure of the internet and the world wide web (seen in the use of the word “online” in the above citations). The selfie is also referred to as a “*smartphone* [emphasis added] self-portrait” (Bruno et al., 2014, p. 45) or “a self-portrait picture taken by an individual using *a digital camera* [emphasis added]” (Wang et al., 2017, p. 34) and, as such, the selfie is understood as a mode of self-portraiture tied to the specific modes of production of a period associated with the technologies of said period (specifically, the smartphone).


It is acknowledged that there are inevitable tensions and slippages in how a selfie is defined (see Senft & Baym, 2015, p. 1589; Eckel et al., 2018, p. 1-23). Such discussions illustrate that the selfie is not an

extraordinary mode of self-portraiture with a set or concrete ontology, but rather the word is better understood through the concept of the anchoring point (or quilting point, *point de capiton*, Lacan, 1977, p. 231). The methodological function of this point is developed from Jacques Lacan's essay—"The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud" (1977)—where he explicates his synthesis of Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of signs (a semiology) in relation to the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud.² For Lacan, the metaphor of the quilting point is used to define how meaning can become fixed at a certain point as meaning is never fixed due to the "incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier" (1977, p. 117). To define the selfie as a quilting point is to indicate that the word knots and ties various relationships together, fixing them, meaning that any definition of the selfie is always discursive (a concept that is examined in Section 3.2.1). This project exemplifies how this point is quilted through the bearing of the body, quilted through gesture, and the meaning of the word "selfie" is expressed and articulated, endured, and supported through a body.

The tension and slippages encountered when defining the selfie are exemplified in a contentious tweet by Paris Hilton. Hilton, a famous United States media figure, posted a tweet on the 19th of November 2017 claiming she invented the selfie some eleven years earlier in 2006 (Hilton, 2017). Embedded within her tweet are two images depicting Hilton alongside singer Britney Spears captured at an undisclosed location (Figure 1.2, see Appendix A). Both Hilton and Spears are looking into a camera with Hilton's visibly outstretched arm seemingly indicating that she is the individual capturing these images. They are indeed images of oneself taken by oneself: a near-verbatim definition of the selfie as per the Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford Academic (Oxford University Press), 2013).

Hilton's tweet was met with aspersions from various Twitter users. When examined, the replies to Hilton's tweets start to demonstrate a repeated pattern in their presentation. First, there is a dismissal of Hilton's claim of invention. Second, this dismissal is ratified with an image of an alleged earlier instance of the selfie.

² Comprehensive introductions to this relationship and discussions on Lacan's semiology be found in Grosz (1990), Rabaté (2003), and Homer (2005).

Various examples illustrate this pattern (collated within Appendix A): there is an image of popular television presenter Bill Nye taking a photo on a plane with the caption “I met Bill Nye on a plane in 1999. Here he is inventing the selfie” (miXerone, 2017, Figure 1.3). Another image of English actor Rowan Atkinson in his role of Mr Bean using a polaroid to capture himself (from the 1991 episode “Mr Bean goes to Town”, (Yash, 2017, Figure 1.4)). Several others also enter this array: actor Will Smith in the *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (Moor, 2017, Figure 1.5), Madonna (MONSIEUR X., 2017, Figure 1.6), George Harrison (Ger, 2017, Figure 1.7), Kramer (Seinfeld Current Day, 2017, Figure 1.8), and Sabrina the teenage witch (freshtwofresh , 2017, Figure 1.9). A parade of various celebrity figures and popular characters are shown capturing images of themselves, and each instance is presented as evidence that the selfie existed before Hilton’s reference to 2006.

Other rebuttals to Hilton come in the form of domestic and vernacular photography of individuals laying claim themselves. One replies to Hilton with: “pretty sure I invented the selfie back in 2002 when disposable cameras were still a thing” (Doww, 2017, Figure 1.10), and another tweet reads “Hey @ParisHilton. I was doing selfies back in 1983 when I was hoping to be a rock star” (Granda, 2017, Figure 1.11). Interspersed with these images are also images of animals and pets seemingly capturing photos of themselves: “This photo was taken by my [cat] Ginger 11 years and one day ago...”, one account tweets (Larry the Cat, 2017, Figure 1.12).

Furthermore, along with the celebrity images and domestic photographs, there is a range of other instances of historical precedents for the invention of the selfie presented in response to Hilton. For example, photos of photographer Joseph Byron (and founder of the Byron Company) capturing an image of himself during the 1920s are provided as evidence of the origins of the selfie (the holiest moliest guacamoliest, 2017, Figure 1.13). Another photograph of an unidentified figure standing before a mirror while capturing an image is dated to 1910 and is offered as an even earlier example (iLoveRoses9, 2017, Figure 1.14). The litany of historical images seemed to develop into something of a competition beneath Hilton’s original tweet with participants vying to see who can conjure the earliest possible instance of the selfie. The earliest photographic image within this collection is an image of Robert Cornelius dated to 1839 (Schiattarella, 2017, Figure 1.15). The image of Cornelius being the

earliest American example of a photographic self-portrait (Library of Congress n.d.); however, such assertions are contentious.³ However, responses move beyond the broader medium of photography as sketches and paintings become included in this collection. Examples of these include a self-portrait sketch by Queen Victoria from 1835 (Hazard, 2017, Figure 1.16), a sketch by Leonardo da Vinci from 1510 (Krishman, 2017, Figure 1.17) and one of Van Gogh's self-portraits (Arnett, 2017, Figure 1.18). In a rather morbid conclusion to this thread of images refuting Hilton's claim, a representation of Jesus of Nazareth is shared. He is depicted holding a smartphone and capturing an image of himself during the moments of the crucifixion (Peter, 2017, Figure 1.19).⁴

Hilton's tweet and the cacophony of responses are plausibly not intended as a rigorous form of historical investigation into the origin of the selfie. The tone, vernacular, and presentation of these tweets are most certainly presented in good humour. However, this event did lead to a more considered examination into the history of the selfie by various news and entertainment outlets. While not explicitly academic, these outlets responded to Hilton's tweet attempting to provide more vigorous and legitimate claims to the origin of the selfie. For example, *BBC Newsbeat* (Rahman-Jones, 2017), the *Irish Times* (Lillington, 2017), *Business Insider* (Martinez, 2017), the *New York Times* (Bromwich, 2017), and other outlets published response articles all discussing the history of the selfie to reveal its true origins.

It is vital to take note of what is happening here if an understanding of the selfie and gesture is to be elicited. Principally, two things require attention. Firstly, the origin of the selfie becomes something crucially important to a growing selfie discourse, and an origin of the thing becomes vitally important without there being any concrete evidence of an origin at all. Secondly, simultaneously, no concrete, historical origin is provided or discovered within this conversation. Instead, the possibility of an origin is obfuscated behind countless examples of historical, domestic, and celebrity figures recording themselves with some type of image capturing device (smartphone, camera, paintbrush et al.). The history of the selfie becomes situated in a state of constant openness. If it were to be defined as an individual photographing themselves with a smartphone, and the genesis moment of this activity was to be

³ An extended discussion on the topic is available at *On This Day in Photography* (McArdle 2019).

⁴ This image is ostensibly part of a larger meme where "real paintings of the past, show... subjects in authentic and modern selfie poses" (von Tease, 2019a). See, for example, the *Classicool* series by digital artist Dito von Tease (2019b).

discovered, the definition of the selfie would be broadened to include individuals photographing themselves with various phone-less camera devices; and once the genesis moment of this activity is uncovered, the definition is opened again to include individuals capturing themselves with paint and pencils. The definition of the selfie becomes so diluted that it ceases to have any function: the selfie becomes something without an origin but with a history.

There is a possible response to this. This claim could be dismissed by uncovering the origin of the word “selfie” itself. The word was seemingly first coined as Australian-English slang. However, the specific time, date, or instance when the word selfie was first used could not be uncovered by this research. The first online usage of the term was dated the 13th of September 2002; this moment is attributed to an individual named Nathan Hope who used the word on an online internet forum. However, Hope—in a later interview (Zimmer, 2013)—stated that “selfie” was not a word he “coined... [but] common slang at the time, used to describe a picture of yourself”. Not a unique nor special term, only the result of a peculiar Australianism in which words are conducted as a hypocoristic.⁵

Regardless of the origins of the word it became anchored—or quilted—into parlance. What is worth noting is that other terms were vying to describe modes of mobile phone self-photography. For example, in South Korea, the word *selca* (셀카)—a compound word meaning combining self and camera (Yoo & Kyoung-Nan, 2011)—has been used to describe the act of taking self-portraits with a mobile device. In Japan, the word *jidori* (自撮り), meaning self-portrait, has been used. Stephen Bull, the author of *Photography* and *Photography and Celebrity*, provided an anecdotal story during a symposium on celebrity portraiture of how the selfie was once referred to as a “forearm-image” or “forearm-picture” (Bull, 2019).

⁵ Evan Kidd et al. explores this particular idiosyncrasy of colloquial Australian English in the article “Language culture and group membership: an investigation into the social effects of colloquial Australian English” (2016). Kidd et al. illustrate how such hypocoristic words—such as the word “selfie”—are “colloquial forms of standard English words... [that] have the same denotation... [and] are characterized by a morpheme, usually -o, -ie/y, -a/er” (2016, p. 714). There are several examples: a service station in Australia is referred to as a “servo”, and a smoke-break is affectionately referred to as a “smoko”. Selfie is another example of this. The morpheme “-ie” is easily identifiable; however, the base word is not. It is within all likelihood that the base word is simply self or self-portrait or, rather, a self-photo—a photo taken of oneself.

But why is this important to note? It is important because it situates the word “selfie” within a history as a peculiar sign with a codifying power. This results in a non-history of the selfie, and thus the history of the selfie becomes impossible because what is being defined when the word “selfie” is used is *not* the production of an image and not a particular mode of self-portraiture, but how a relationship can be defined between an individual and a device used to capture their image. This is why the term selfie is better understood as a quilting point, but not just a point of meaning, but a point of relationships.

Therefore, research surrounding the selfie becomes research on what semantic, social, technological, and historical flows have become knitted and fettered along with the growing and repeated use of this term. Or, put another way, the term selfie is not a signifier of a particular and specific ontology; instead, it is better to understand how the emergence of the term selfie, its rise in popularity, its irruption into popular discourse, and its insistent and repeated repetition allowed for various discrete and separate flows to become knotted and arranged as a series of relations. The term selfie is not representative of a series of components as, evidently, these are subject to change. Rather, “selfie” is a term used to collate a series of relationships.

For this reason, the selfie is sometimes defined as an assemblage as it is better understood as a relationship of heterogeneous parts and not the parts themselves (Senft & Baym, 2015, p. 1589, Hess, 2015, Kedzior & Allen, 2016, p. 1899). For example, Aaron Hess uses the concept of assemblage to navigate the ontological tensions encountered when attempting to define the selfie; demonstrating that an examination of the selfie is an examination of various components of the selfie-assemblage including the self, physical space, the device, and the network (2015, p. 1630-1631). Hess’s work demonstrates that there is a methodological impetus on the researcher to be clear in the parts and relationships they wish to discuss. The initial step of any reading of an assemblage is identifying parts and describing the Borromean relationship they have developed (Hess, 2015, p. 1630).

Considering these problems and difficulties in defining the selfie, the research presented in this project avoids these methodological brambles by exclusively focusing on the moment immediately *before* the digital image is captured: the moment an individual grasps a mobile device, extends the arm before

them, prepares and organises the body, and decides that they are ready to produce an image. It is at this moment that the relationship between the body, device, and mirror are the most intense. This moment, this thesis posits, results in what can be referred to as a *collapse into gesture* as the perceptual capacities of the body become consolidated into an apparatus.

To understand this moment, an examination of the form factor of a mobile device is required.

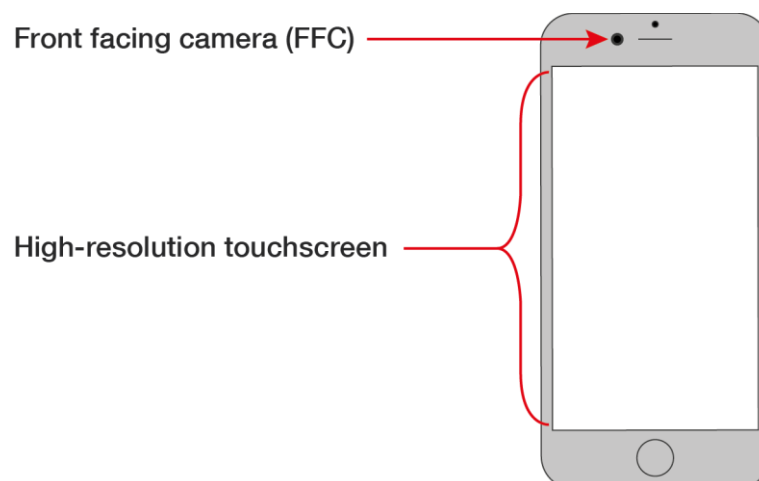
1.3 How developments in mobile phone form factor resulted in a mirror creating the novel selfie interface

The form factor of a mobile device is the arrangement of constituent parts that define it (see NokiaPort.de, n.d.). For example, the Apple iPhone popularised what is referred to as the “slate” form factor recognisable by a large touchscreen and rectangular shape (as seen in the iPhone or Samsung Galaxy models). This form factor is generically referred to as a smartphone and is undoubtedly one of the most prevalent form factors available at the time of writing. Other mobile phone form factors include the “bar” or “candybar” where the front screen is accompanied by a physical keyboard (such as the Nokia 3310) or the “flip” or “clamshell” (such as the Motorola Razr) where the screen and keyboard fold across a hinge.

But it is the slate that is of importance as common to the slate form factor is the front-facing camera (FFC) that accompanies the large high-resolution screen, as illustrated in Figure 1.20.

Figure 1.20

An illustration of the slate form factor



The FFC first appeared as early as 1999 in the Kyocera Visual Phone VP-210. In 2003, there was the release of various devices that had a rear camera and FFC: the Motorola A920, Samsung E700, and the Sony Ericsson Z1010. The first iPhone, the device that ostensibly led to the popularity of the slate, did not have an FFC, and it was only with the release of the iPhone 4 in 2010 that this became standard. In early instances, the FFC was used for video calling (an activity which has a history leading back to as early as 1964 with the Bell System Picture Phone, and earlier still to the telephonoscope concept of 1878),⁶ however it was still marketed in some instances as a method for taking self-portraits (see the advertisement for the Samsung E700 (La Maison de la Pub, 2019)).

Regarding the slate specifically, what is important to note is that when the FFC is activated, the large screen is always activated in tandem. Video from the FFC is constantly streamed to this screen. This appears to create a mirror, or at the very least a surface, with specular aspirations. When the phone is held before an individual they can see themselves in real-time, as shown in Figure 1.21. Although the FFC is streaming live video, it still maintains its properties as a camera. and photographs can be captured during this functioning. Put otherwise: selfies can be taken while looking into a mirror.

⁶ The telephonoscope was never a fully realised piece of technology but rather a satirical image depicted in the satirical British satire magazine *Punch* (Du Maurier, 1878). For a detailed discussion and commentary on this image as “a rhetorical object, a novel invention or a satirical illustration”, see Roberts’s “Edison’s Telephonoscope: the visual telephone and the satire of electric light mania” (2017).

Figure 1.21

An example of the mirror created through the relationship with a high-resolution screen and FFC

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*Note: From *Hearing with Helena Dalli, candidate commissioner for equality* [photograph] by European Parliament, 2019, ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hearing_with_Helena_Dalli,_candidate_commissioner_for_equality_\(48832415567\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hearing_with_Helena_Dalli,_candidate_commissioner_for_equality_(48832415567).jpg))*

This form factor results in the camera and the mirror becoming inseparable during the selfie process. It is not the only form factor to offer this functionality. The Samsung E700 mentioned above also creates this mirror. Also, it should be mentioned that Samsung released several digital cameras—the TL225 and TL220 with “DualView” (Moynihan, 2009)—that also developed this mirror. However, the slate form factor makes this mirror seamless. The FFC and screen always operate in conjunction with one another, and therefore this mode of selfie-taking is an engagement with both a camera and a mirror simultaneously. To note: selfies can also be created with the use of the other camera(s) of the mobile device, and such images are often captured in bathroom or bedroom mirrors (colloquially referred to as mirror selfies). There is also undoubtedly a relationship between the camera and the mirror here.

However, for this project, selfies captured with the FFC and the created mirror are examined (research on the mobile device pointed at a separate mirror is presented in Chapter 2, Section 2.2).

The relationship between an individual, the FFC, the high-resolution touchscreen, and the mirror created in their combination results in what this thesis refers to as the novel selfie interface. This definition of interface is borrowed from Branden Hookway’s text (2014, p. xi) that defines the interface

“not as the technology itself, but the relationship with the technology”. Furthermore, this definition of interface also acknowledges the work of Alexander R. Galloway (2012, p. 30) who writes that the interface is not exclusively a relationship with a surface, but also how this surface can act as a threshold or transition and is often discussed through metaphors of doors or windows that one can pass through⁷. What is key to note in discussions surrounding an interface is that an analysis of an interface is not an examination of an arrangement of constituent parts but an examination of how an individual interacts with, contends with, or experiences this combination. In this regard, the selfie in terms of this project can be understood as a means of interfacing through this arrangement of mobile device, FFC, etc. and not exclusively the process of capturing an image.

There exists extensive discussion within selfie studies regarding this interface and the relationship defined by the camera and the mirror, and an individual capturing their image is read explicitly (Tiidenberg, 2014, 2015, 2016; Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015; Warfield, 2014a, 2014b, 2017a, 2017b; Warfield et al., 2016; Walker, 2005; Walker-Rettberg, 2014). For the most part, this literature contends with a distinction in the method a camera produces an image and the method a mirror produces an image. Within the literature, these two categories of image function differently in the creation of an image of the body. The selfie is argued to produce an image of the body that is quite different from what can, for the moment, be referred to as a traditional- or classical mode of photography as the selfie creates both photographic and mirror images near-simultaneously, or, at least, concomitant to one another. While the ontology of these two modes of image will be detailed throughout this thesis, it would be beneficial to present a framework for how these two images have come to be understood within selfie studies.

1.3.1 Proposition one: the camera image is an image created via apparatus.

In his book on photography, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, Vilém Flusser uses the term “technical image” (2000, p. 14-16) to refer to the image created by a camera. A technical image is not a

⁷ An extended and thorough examination of the concept of the window metaphor is available in Anne Friedberg’s *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (2006), where this metaphor is traced throughout (predominantly Western) history

representation of phenomena but a representation of what Flusser refers to as programs, as the technical image is an image produced by *apparatus*. The word apparatus stems from a genealogy of critical theory that is presented in various instances within the research of Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, and Giorgio Agamben. The specific details of the apparatus within the research of these figures and its nuanced methodological potential of the conceptualisation of the term will be discussed later (Chapter 3); however, for the moment, within this scope, an apparatus is not technology (in this instance, the camera), but the technology and its incumbent social, cultural, and political extensities; and how said extensities are deployed resulting in an individual becoming subject to its workings.

Therefore, to refer to an apparatus—the camera—is to discuss the ontic properties of the device and its myriad functionalities, associated correct and acceptable means of use, the array of social codes and programs that define this use, structures of knowledge which define these codes, and the dominant power strategies that dictate the horizons of the possibilities of this knowledge. An apparatus is not just the thing, but how a thing has come to function within a society, community, or population (and in turn shaped the boundaries, horizons, and parameters of these groupings). Other examples of apparatus include the church, school, university, but an apparatus can also include things such as “the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cellular telephones and—why not—language itself” (Agamben, 2009, p. 14).

Discussed through such a conceptualisation, a camera is not an apparatus in and of itself but becomes an apparatus in how it is used and how it provides the means for its use through certain understandings of its functions and practices (knowledge) and institutional networks (power). This echoes the definition of the interface provided above, and there is considerable crossover between research on the apparatus and interface theory (Galloway, 2012, pp. 36, 40, 48-49; Hookway, 2014, pp. 26-32), as the interface is not the technology itself, but the relationship with technology, the apparatus is what dictates, defines, outlines, develops and allows for the possibility of these relationships.

An individual who makes use of the camera-apparatus to capture a selfie also becomes captured in the determining features of the device, and therefore they can be understood as being subject to this

apparatus. An individual who is made subject to an apparatus can therefore not “think and act wholly according to their own reason... [and therefore] the subject is the product of the conjunction of history and the unconscious, and not a naturally occurring or ready-made entity” (Buchanan, 2010). Therefore, the subject of Figure 1.1 (for example) is an individual captured by the mobile device and captured by a specific moment of history that determines the horizons and possibilities of this mode of self-portraiture. Or, as succinctly put by Flusser, “the act of photography the camera does the will of the photographer, but the photographer has to will what the camera can do” (2000, p. 35).

Because the device is used in a certain way, the images created via this device are therefore a result of various parameters, such as the dimensions of the form factor mentioned above, the mobile operating system, the electronic capacities of the digital camera and so on (the specifics of which will be discussed in Section 3.5). Also, parameters determined by electronic, social, and cultural networks through which these images are shared. For example, Don Slater suggests in “Domestic photography as programmed and digital culture” (1995) that an alternative metaphor for the photographic album during a paradigm of digital, online photography would be the “wall” or “pinboard”. This photographic wall is where photography will exist as a form of programmed leisure (Slater, 1999, p. 139). He describes the wall as “snapshots taken by us or friends... take their place alongside images cut from newspapers... pictures of pop stars and celebrities... a haphazard and ephemeral shifting collage which produced by and within the activities of the present” (Slater, 1999, p. 139). Slater was writing before the widespread adoption of (digital) social media; however, his metaphoric wall is prescient of the Facebook timeline, Instagram explore page, and Snapchat discover of contemporary social media—the home of the selfie. Research conducted by Andrew Cox illustrates this. Cox traces a line from Slater’s argumentative approach to socialised domestic photography into social media spaces in two papers: “Flickr: A Case Study of Web 2.0” (2008a) and “Flickr: A First Look at User Behaviour in the Context of Photography as Serious Leisure” (2008b, with Clough and Marlow). Cox’s delineation of Flickr’s web 2.0 characteristics reveals the augury of Slater’s wall or pinboard metaphor and concludes that it is the “the social features of networks that are central, not photography” (Cox 2008: 502). Social media is fundamental to understanding the selfie, and the selfie could not exist without it. To create the image is

simply part one, but this creation is *sine non qua* to sharing it online. While this thesis does not examine social media directly, the evidence within this literature shows that the apparatus is always determined beyond the tool itself (the camera, for instance), and social media becomes one of the extensities of the device. However, these machinations are not always apparent, and their workings are ostensibly unknown to the individual using the device. For this reason, an apparatus (such as the FFC-apparatus) “creates images automatically” (Flusser, 2000, p. 29, discussed in Section 3.4 in conjunction with the concept of transparent immediacy developed by Bolter and Grusin (1999, pp. 21-31)).

Viewing the selfie through such a framework (of the apparatus and the subject) arguably speaks to a determinism, a word meaning that the intentions, motivations, and freedoms of the subject are dictated not through their free will but instead through the confines of the apparatus and its various extensities. The device itself determines the technical image, and the period determines the processes of the individual. However, what is perhaps more interesting is that the subject is not aware that they are subject to the apparatus. The danger of the apparatus is that it defines an individual as a subject while simultaneously remaining *invisible*, allowing the docile subject to exist with an impression of being free. Through a series of practices, discourses, and bodies of knowledge, “docile, yet free, bodies [are created] that assume their identity and their ‘freedom’ as subjects” (Agamben, 2009, pp. 19-20). This process is called desubjectification.

Through this framework, the selfie is arguably not a mode of self- or creative expression, but rather a process of desubjectification, giving the subject a belief that their images are their own while being automatic to the processes of the camera and an arbitrary series of codes reverberating through a moment in history (Senft & Baym, 2015, p. 1589). For this reason, a theoretical conceptualisation of the selfie is presented by Baishya (2015), who forwards that the selfie is “not a matter of mere technological advancement over older forms of recording the self through oil paintings or even celluloid photography—the selfie is not *merely* modern technology, it is a different *technic* altogether” (2015, p. 1688). Baishya draws on the work of Bernard Stiegler to provide a framework for differentiating the selfie from an existing history of self-portraiture. It is argued that Stiegler describes technics as the “pursuit of life by other means than life” (1998, p. 17) and technology is not a material apparatus but

instead a process that affectively ingrains in individuals normalised movements, behaviours, and habits (Bayishi, 2015, p. 1688). This framework, it is continued, illustrates “that selfies and selfie-taking, like many other forms of digital culture, are not merely outside us but also within us” (2015, p. 1688) as desubjectified individuals.

Researchers writing on the novel selfie interface of FFC and screen would agree with such argumentation. As such, it is argued that the image created by the camera is constructed and worthy of distrust and suspicion. As Tiidenberg writes, for example, the “regime of truth” of photography is “no longer prevalent among visual scholars and scholars of photography [as] photos are seen as ‘a negotiated version of reality’ (Pink, 2005, p. 20), tools for identity formation and communication, currency for social interaction (van Dijck, 2008, p. 62) and carriers of various forms of capital (Schwarz, 2010)” (2014). Also, as Walker-Rettberg writes (Walker, 2005, p. 2), the camera forces “a separation between subject and object ... To be photographed or filmed is thus to be objectified”. The camera in the novel selfie interface produces an image that should be interrogated.

1.3.2 Proposition two: the mirror image resists the desubjectification of the camera through the novel selfie interface

The consensus within selfie studies is that the image produced by the mirror has the potential to liberate the subject from the desubjectifying confines of the apparatus as the novel selfie interface is never exclusively a technical image of the camera-apparatus as the production of this image is always accompanied by the mirror image. This is because the mirror is a surface that shows whatever is placed before it, and with this, it is argued to have revealing and supposedly truth-telling properties as it produces a fundamentally different image to the individual in comparison to the technical apparatus-image constructed and produced by the camera To borrow Flusser’s vocabulary once again, if the image dictated by the camera is a technical one, the image produced by the mirror is a “phenomenal” or “traditional” image (2000, pp. 8-13; 2011, p. 6) which he describes as “reductions of the four dimensions of space and time to the two surface dimensions”: an encoding of phenomena into two dimensions (2000, p. 8) and therefore not an automatic process of the dominant strategies and cultural stipulations of the codes and programs of the apparatus.

Close examinations of the role of the mirror within this interface have allowed researchers within selfie studies to revisit concepts of accuracy (Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015, p. 89) and authenticity (Warfield, 2017a, pp. 85-86, 89). Accordingly, this bestows on the selfie the ability to be conceptualised as a practice of freedom (Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015, pp. 89-93). The role of the mirror within this interface is argued to lead to processes of destabilisation of the subject (Tiidenberg, 2014), the resistance of institutionalised practices (Tiidenberg, 2015, p. 1754), deeper self-reflection (Warfield, 2014), and an active (re)negotiation of the body (Warfield, 2017a, p. 86). Within this literature, the mirror/camera/subject ternary—as an interface—produces a novel means of perceiving the body through the negotiation of these two categories of image: the technical image produced by the camera and the phenomenal image produced by the mirror. In this regard, an individual is no longer beset by the social coding of photography (as an apparatus) as the supposedly liberating capacity of the mirror allows for a more negotiated (re)presentation of an individual.

1.4 Research problem: The novel selfie interface and the myth of invisibility permeating the mirror

Although the current consensus within selfie research offers a novel description of this novel selfie interface, the research presented in this thesis expands these discussions surrounding this relationship. It begins with a point of contention and posits that the mirror has not been fully conceptualised within selfie studies, especially regarding the mirror created via the FFC. An argument could be made that this mirror is not a true mirror as it is not a surface of silvered glass that produces a specular reflection; however, such an argument would require a reduction of this mirror to its ontic traits and characteristics. The combination of FFC and high-resolution screen that provides the impression of a mirror is still treated as one, and therefore it is methodically sound for this arrangement to be investigated as such. What is required to conceptualise this mirror more effectively is not an ontological query but rather an examination of this mirror through the framework of the apparatus.

Simply, it is a mistake to not regard the mirror as an apparatus and not bestow upon it the same critical investigation performed on the camera. However, caution needs to be taken immediately as this vocabulary is bound to lead to some confusion; in particular for researchers working in film studies. To

consider the mirror as an apparatus is not the same as the argument that runs through apparatus theory of the cinema in which the mirror is a metaphor for discussions on how a subject (mis)recognise themselves on the cinema screen (Baudry, 1986, p. 313; Metz, 1977, p. 48; Mulvey, 1989, pp. 17-18; Sobchack, 1992, pp. 14-17, 105-107, for example). Such work on cinema, referred to as apparatus theory, draws from the genealogy of apparatus research mentioned in Section 1.3.1, the work of Althusser (1971, pp. 196-199) and his synthesis of theories of the apparatus and psychoanalytic theories (notably the mirror-stage of Lacan, 1977, pp. 2-3, 15, 234). However, in this project, it is the mirror as an image-producing device that requires examination as an apparatus. While the research on the cinema apparatus and work on the mirror stage is indubitably useful for understanding the mirror and its relation to the subject (discussed in Section 6.3), here the mirror is a mirror: not a cinema or metaphor for (mis)recognition. It is a historically specular surface that is mimicked by the FFC and the high-resolution screen.

The reason for focusing on, or returning to, the mirror as apparatus is a method for positing that this surface is not a neutral one as the extant literature on the selfie infers but rather, “an omnipresent, quintessentially value-laden (non-innocent) material apparatus of the West” (Mudde, 2015, p. 547). The research presented returns to the mirror and its role in the constitution of the subject in relation to the selfie under the auspice of the apparatus. Any liberating or authentic potentials of the mirror are therefore shown to be suspect.

Matters are complicated further as there is a false separation between the image produced by the camera and the image produced by the mirror during the selfie-taking process. Their relationship is so intertwined that to consider them separate is impossible. This is not a discussion of a camera-apparatus and a mirror-apparatus, but a discussion of a singular apparatus through which the codes and programs of the mirror and camera are overlapped, entangled, and made complex as a new series of relationships are formed. The focus on the mirror within this research is not to separate these two images but to revisit how new relationships are developed at the level of the production of the image of the body through the selfie.

However, the codes and programs of the mirror are difficult to discern. This is not because existing research on the novel selfie interface is inadequate, but rather because the consensus within selfie studies falls prey to an *invisibility* implicit within the relationship a subject develops with a mirror. In short, the mirror is not seen. In this thesis, this invisibility is shown to play an important role in the process of desubjectification experienced by the selfie-taker, and it is this invisibility that is the primary site of investigation within this thesis leading to two initial research questions:

- 1.) What are the ramifications of this invisibility in the creation of the subject?
- 2.) How is this desubjectification of an individual maintained within the apparatus through its invisibility?

Therefore, it is not strictly the image nor reflection created by the mirror that is of importance here. Rather, it is the method in which the mirror-apparatus manages to organise an image of the body *through its gesture* that is argued to lead to this desubjectification. This organisation is gesture. It is demonstrated comprehensively how the mirror is shown to impel the body into gesturing within this project, and it is this very gesturing that reinforces the desubjectification of an individual.

1.5 Methodological considerations for exploring gesture in relation to an apparatus and some of the immediate limitations implicit within the existing literature

The concept of gesture requires substantial work to effectively demonstrate and evidence this claim to fully realise and conceptualise the methodological complexity of this topic as a bearing or deportment of the body. There has been some work on the selfie as a gesture (notably Eckel et al., 2018; Frosh, 2015, 2019; Ruchatz, 2018; Senft & Baym, 2015), but the paucity of work directly associated with the subject is in part due to a difficulty in terms of what gesture is and what gesture does (detailed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). This means that a conceptualisation of gesture requires expanding beyond that of a symbolic movement of the body (such as a wave or a thumbs-up) rather to consider how gesture situates a subject within the apparatus.

Literature on gesture and the apparatus is certainly valuable in this regard as it provides a framework for understanding how an apparatus can transform, dictate, or influence the gestures of an individual

(Adorno, 1951, p. 40; Agamben, 2000, p. 48; Foucault, 1978, p. 141; Henriques et al., 2014, pp. 13-14; Rabinbach, 1990, p. 2). The consensus of this literature is that the movements of an individual become mechanised, controlled, and subjugated through the dominant power strategies of the apparatus, and therefore the subject becomes desubjectified. However, this research submits that these theories of gesture and the apparatus exhibit some fundamental limitations when attempting to understand the *experience* of the gesturing subject. To overcome these limitations, gesture needs to be reconsidered in terms of phenomenology if the critical potential of gesture is to be fully realised. Phenomenology as a method contends with structures of experience and the intentionality of an individual and provides a means of contending with gesture at the level of experience; through phenomenology, the experience of the mirror becomes a valuable point of access for understanding how the mirror ultimately desubjectifies an individual. It is, in short, not the apparatus that desubjectifies but the experience of the apparatus that does this. This is achieved most pointedly through how phenomenology (the phenomenological research of Maurice Merleau-Ponty presented in *Phenomenology of Perception* (2012), and later adapted in his essay “The intertwining—the chiasm” (1964)) demands a more dynamic understanding of the body (detailed within Chapter 4).

Phenomenology and examinations of phenomenologies of gesture illustrate that the selfie cannot be effectively considered exclusively through categories of image (technical or otherwise) and should rather be understood as what is referred to here as a volume of relations. The relations being both the heterogeneous relations of the apparatus and the perceptual relations—phenomena—developed at the level of experience. To consider this volume of relations effectively, the critical vocabulary provided by assemblage theory offers solutions to how this is articulated. To note, the use of assemblage here is not as a methodological counterpoint to navigate the slippages of defining a selfie as presented in the work of Hess (cited in Section 1.2). The theoretical vocabulary of assemblage allows for an examination of how collections of heterogeneous relations are organised (the details and literature of this method are discussed in Chapter 6), and the organisation of the body is crucial to desubjectification within this organisation. In this regard, the selfie is not discussed as an assemblage, nor is the human body

encountering the device discussed as assemblage: rather, the assemblage in question is the assemblage of the device, the body, and various instances of perception that result in gesture.

The relationship between the apparatus and the movements of an individual can be complex to navigate, and this makes it difficult to consolidate these theories through assemblage comprehensively, however. What is key to note in this assembling is how gesture organises a body through the production of affects: affects here not meaning emotion nor feelings, but rather a sort of gravity, transition or conductivity between perception and action. The use of affects here follows a genealogy of work beginning with Baruch Spinoza in *Ethics* and elaborated upon through various writings of Henri Bergson (1988, pp. 54-55), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1994, pp. 163-165), and Brian Massumi (2002, pp. 27-28). The philosophical theory of affects becomes a means to express the stuff of the relations organised within an assemblage, and therefore invisibility becomes part of how the arrangement is assembled. In other words, this arrangement is only possible because elements are invisible, and an invisibility is requisite for desubjectification to occur efficiently. The understanding of the mirror, the gesture of the body, the production of the selfie become arranged and assembled through lines of invisibility, resulting in a complete desubjectification of the subject (discussed in detail in Chapter 5).

This then leads to a novel method for conceptualising a desubjectified image of the body: not the technical image of the camera or the mirror, but the image of the body that proceeds it which the device attempts to capture. Massumi refers to this as a “body without an image” (2002, p. 57) which can be understood as a *virtual* impression or understanding of the body that becomes *actualised* as it encounters the device. To note: the virtual is not different from reality, but a functor of reality which exists as part of a multiplicity directly connected to the actual: a potential within a thing (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 149). It is not the body that encounters the apparatus resulting in the selfie, rather, the body-without-an-image becomes actualised through the apparatus creating a gesture, and it is this gesture that results in the novel selfie interface. The selfie and its relationship with gesture is not a body making use of a device. The selfie and gesture are the body actualising itself in such a way so that it can interface

with the codes, programs, and machinations of the apparatus. Therefore, it is seemingly impossible to escape the gravity of desubjectification.

Ultimately, this discussion leads to the following hypothesis: the selfie is the result of a *gestural assembling*—an assembling between an apparatus and a perceiving body—that provides the body with gesture. Gesture here is presented as a bodily organisation of phenomenal perception through affect into action that allows for the body to (not) perceive the apparatus. However, this perception allotted to the body during this gestural assembling is not revealing nor productive. Instead, it is examined how this assembling makes apparatus invisible, invisible in the sense that the apparatus is present but not apparent. The selfie then is shown to be two-sided: incredibly visible through its production, distribution, and sharing, but simultaneously incredibly invisible as it further obfuscates and hides various codes and programs through its collapse into the organisation of perception into the gesture of an individual.

1.5.1 A postdigital epistemology

Only once this has been thoroughly established can the true extensity of the selfie apparatus be considered. While it has been mentioned that the novel selfie interface is not a combination of camera or mirror-apparatus exclusively, this apparatus extends well beyond this interface. To fully conceptualise how an apparatus operates and desubjectifies an individual, it is required that an apparatus (novel or otherwise) is situated within a period in history. Consider Figure 1.1 again, however, not as a selfie but as a glitched image. A glitch is an interruption, malfunction, or disruption within a digital assembling (its etymological root is possibly derived “from the German *glitschig*, meaning ‘slippery’” (Benson-Allcott, 2013, p. 127)). Within Figure 1.1, the glitch is evidenced in the violent colours which occupy the bottom half of the image. These swathes of colour were not intended, nor were they added through editing or manipulation. They are a result of a malfunction that occurred when the image was captured. Such a glitch is ostensibly not common to the selfie, with some arguing that the removal of glitches is part of the selfie process (Warfield, 2017a). It is also not entirely understood what caused this glitch to happen when this selfie was captured. (Of the selfies produced since this is the only image created

displaying such a glitch). It is a glitch *because* it was unexpected and interrupting. The image was stored in memory but not as intended, and as it was saved (or written), bands of violent colour came to be strewn across its bottom half.

This glitch indicates two things here. Firstly, it reveals the pixelization of the selfie and offers a reminder that the image is a technical image: “not a surface but a mosaic assembled from particles” (Flusser, 2011, p. 6). This glitch was not present on the digital mirror screen, and it only occurred after the image was captured. However, the information broke down within its array. The glitch also reminds us, secondly, of the complex relationship between the body and the digital (cf. Benson-Allott, 2013; Cascone, 2000, also, Rosa Menkman’s *Glitch Studies Manifesto* (2009/2010)) and the ability through glitches to make the digital visible is important as a digital glitch can “derail perception and inject the microtemporal misfirings of the computer into our subjective awareness” (Denson, 2020, p. 2). While the selfie is not an explicitly digital gesture (as it is not a gesture that interreacts intentionally with the digital as these aspects occur automatically), the digital is vital to the act of selfie-taking, and selfie-takers actively engage in possibly unintentional digital activity. This glitch resulted in something occurring not common to selfie practice: it placed the digital on display.

In terms of the argument presented, this glitch is an attestation of the historical period in which this apparatus has come to be defined. This period is defined in this project as a postdigital one. It is a period in which the machinations of digital technologies have become increasingly pervasive, and the “tendrils of digital technology have in some way touched everyone” (Cascone, 2000, p. 12). However, while some have described the digital as an “impenetrable veil” (Cascone, 2000, p. 12), the digital as a membrane—a metaphor attributed to Pepperell and Punt (2002, pp. 2-3)—is perhaps more adequate as it is “like a transparent wall [that] both connects and divides” (2002, pp. 2-3). In this regard, the transparency of the digital speaks to the invisibility posited above: as it is present, but not apparent, but connecting everything. Most pertinent about this period is not in the ubiquity of digital technology (which is a rhetorical supposition (Emerson, 2014; Greenfield, 2006; Shanbaum, 2020)), but in how this invisibility is fettered through the perceptive and affective capacities of gesture. While others have argued that the ubiquity and invisibility of the digital are developed through ephemeral metaphors such

as that of the cloud (Hu, 2015), this project examines how the digital is made invisible through the gesture of an individual using the selfie as a key case. In other words, the invisibility of the digital is not only that which is said and unsaid but that which is expressed through the grasping and gesturing of the device through movements such as the selfie.

Ultimately, although this thesis does not explicitly discuss or examine the postdigital condition, it acknowledges the postdigital as a broader episteme in which the selfie has come to exist. Therefore, the postdigital becomes a means of talking about the selfie, and it will therefore emerge as a point of discussion (and contention) at various points throughout this thesis, explicitly or not. In this regard, the selfie can be posited as a postdigital gesture as it makes the digital invisible by making the body visible. Digital apparatus are not revealed but hidden through their encounter with the body and its gestural assembling.

1.6 Outlines and précis of the chapters of this thesis

1.6.1 Précis for Chapter 2: The novel selfie interface and the myth of invisibility pervading the mirror

The second chapter begins with a review of the relationship between the selfie and the mirror.

The chapter begins with an examination of the mirror selfie to answer the question of why individuals so readily take pictures of themselves in mirrors. The ubiquity of the mobile device and the mirror are discussed in this regard; however, this leads to a second question of whether these images are a deliberate method of self-portraiture or, arguably, merely chance, given that individuals have phones with cameras and mirrors are everywhere. It is shown that this question devolves into an argument of what is being photographed (the mirror or reflection), and the complexities of this question are discussed in relation to two images: Ilse Bing's photograph *Self-portrait with Leica* (1931) and Diego Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas* (1656): both of which existed long before the selfie but reveal how complex this relationship is.

This discussion then leads to a renewed discussion of the selfie in which the mirror and camera are no longer two discrete technologies but a single arrangement: the novel selfie interface. This section expands upon the literature introduced in Section 1.3 and details how the camera and mirror image are discussed in conjunction with one another (expanding upon the propositions introduced in Sections 1.3.1 and 1.3.2).

The chapter shows how the myth of invisibility of the mirror has come to pervade this literature, and this myth of invisibility is examined in detail. It is posited that there are two overarching factors that led to this invisibility. Firstly, the ubiquity of the mirror as an object in both private and public spaces. Second, its role as a technology of light and how the metaphor of light-as-knowledge has come to make the mirror invisible. The chapter draws on interdisciplinary literature on the mirror to demonstrate this; examining sources from art history (Cumming, 2009, p. 141; Panofsky, 1986; Seidel, 1989, p. 80; Zucker, 1962, p. 242), philosophy (Derrida, 1978a, p. 31; Eco, 1976, p. 202; Mudde, 2015, p. 540), photography (Holmes, 1858; Miles, 2005, p. 330), and general histories (Melchior-Bonnet, 2001, p. 98; Pendergrast, 2003, p. ix): all to reveal and present the mirror and its myth of invisibility.

The chapter concludes by arguing that the mirror needs to be understood as apparatus if this invisibility is to be made visible if the selfie is to be more comprehensively conceptualised.

1.6.2 Précis for Chapter 3: Methodological considerations for interrogating the mirror as apparatus and an exemplification of the troubling strangeness of the novel selfie interface

Chapter 3 demonstrates the methodological potential of the concept of apparatus in understanding this mirror. The reading of apparatus presented is primarily influenced and read from the writings of Foucault (1970a; 1998). Foucault's extended project was concerned with how power, knowledge, and discourse are produced, hidden, stipulated, and conducted through various apparatus and how these lead to the creation of a docile subject. The work of Foucault (1972a, pp. 194-195) defines apparatus as a complex set of instructions through which knowledge is produced.

While Foucault's framework for reading an apparatus offers an invaluable foundation and vocabulary for this discussion, this framework is expanded through the research of Flusser and Agamben. By

expanding this theory of the apparatus in this way, apparatus of the media can be read more explicitly. Flusser's research on the camera is significant in this regard, and that work can be leveraged as a methodological precedent through which other apparatus (the mirror, the mobile phone, the computer) can be critically analysed (2000; 2011). In short, this framework allows for an appraisal of the apparatus and its functioning in the process of creating an image. It is through the work of Agamben (2000; 2009) that the apparatus is viewed in relation to the concept of desubjectification, which is defined as how a docile subject believes themselves to be free while remaining docile to the strategies of the device. It is shown how the automatic production of images leads to the docility of the subject.

The novel selfie interface is returned to and re-examined following these methodological considerations. Most importantly, it is demonstrated that there are various breaks that occur between the expectation of specular reflection and the ability for an individual to see themselves in this novel selfie interface: break defined as the interstices between the smoothness of the specular surface and the distance created between the screen and camera in the device. However, it is questioned why these breaks are largely ignored, displaced, and made invisible within the interface. Or, in other words, why this contraption that is not a mirror is treated as one. It is demonstrated that this is due to the prevailing and demonstrably repeated myth of invisibility that has obfuscated and problematised how the novel selfie interface creates an impression of a reflection in the context of the selfie.

The chapter concludes by showing that these breaks are not ignored by the body as they become embodied within the interface through movement. In short: a break obliges the body to readjust its gesture to accommodate its difficulties.

1.6.3 Précis for Chapter 4: The role of gesture in organising the perceptual break when encountering the apparatus

The primary point of discussion within this chapter is gesture. The chapter begins with some preliminary discussions around gesture by illustrating the methodological difficulties encountered when attempting to understand gesture as a symbolic movement. Regarding the symbolic, research is presented that examines gesture as a sign (drawing from semiology and linguistics) and illustrates how

these signs are prone to misrecognition and misunderstandings. A close reading of gestural notations and a close reading of a vignette from Jane Campion and Gerard Lee's *Passionless Moments* (1983) titled "A neighbourly misunderstanding" is used to illustrate the limitations of a symbolic reading of gesture.

Following this, gesture is read primarily as a property of the body, as a movement. This is examined through research into mime. Mime, as a discipline, attempted to understand the situatedness of the body and return the body to pure medium through the research and teachings of Jacques Copeau, Étienne Decroux and Jacques Lecoq. A central consensus within mime is that individuals experienced a "forgetting" of the body (Lecoq, 2000, p. 22). This is read in conjunction with work on apparatus and how the body is forgotten through its movements.

However, the movement and the symbolic registers are shown to be at odds with one another. It is thus argued that gesture is discussed in terms of phenomenology. Through phenomenology, arguably commonplace definitions of gesture are replaced with a more dynamic conceptualisation of gesture as an inbetweenness; or rather, to borrow from philosopher Julia Kristeva, gesture is described as *anaphora* (1987, p. 269, detailed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5).

The chapter does not argue that gesture sits between the subject and the device, as such an assumption is arguably predicated on a dualistic reading of gesture (that is to say, a reading that gesture translates the intentions of the mind into the movements of the body) which can be resisted through a phenomenological reading. The phenomenology used was drawn primarily from the study of philosophers Edmund Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Flusser. Husserl's work in this thesis is foundational as it introduces the method of phenomenology and how it provides a novel method of examining objects (Husserl, 1969; 1982; 1989) that requires that a researcher not attend to the empirical properties of the object itself (such as a mirror), but the experience of an object. It is through Husserl that discussions of the body-as-object can be problematised, requiring that the body be revisited. This revisiting of the body is primarily attended to through the work of Merleau-Ponty who provided the indispensable methodological requirements necessary for understanding the body as presented here

(not as an object, but as a perceiving centre (Merleau-Ponty, 1964; 2012)). Gesture—when read as phenomena—requires a rethinking of how the body perceives itself through its movements, and therefore gesture cannot be understood as a symbolic movement but rather a method of situating oneself within an apparatus (Flusser, 2000).

1.6.4 Précis for Chapter 5: Gesture, the hand, and desubjectification: how gestures move from being invisible to being human

This chapter builds on the work on apparatus conducted in Chapter 3 and the research on phenomenology presented in Chapter 4. It does so by examining the hand as a site of gesture, beginning with an extended discussion on the research of Jürgen Streeck, which is expanded through the concept of “fit” introduced by Heidi Rae Cooley. However, while the hand becomes the zenithal appendage for such discussions, this is shown to be a rather insular (at best) and occasionally ableist (at worst). This is evidenced by two brief cases in which individuals without hands still manage to take selfies while engaging with this interface (for example). Notions of haptics and tacitly are considered, and the notion of touch is expanded upon (following Strauven 2021, p. 23).

This complex discussion is examined through two extensive case studies presented in this chapter. Firstly, the rhetoric and performance surrounding the launch of the iPhone in 2007 are critically examined. What is of particular interest is the determination to make gesture invisible in terms of the device (although still falling prey to various cultural and racial signifiers). The second case study focuses on a viral video in which a chimpanzee uses a smartphone. What is key to note in this case and exemplified in the chapter is not the importance of the gestures of the chimpanzee but how these gestures were discussed as human gestures. This trajectory is shown to be a consummate example of desubjectification as these movements that were new and alien just ten years prior are suddenly revealed to be *human*.

A line is drawn through these two cases from the invisibility proposed by Jobs in 2007 to how these gestures were recognised as human in 2019. To fully appraise this change, Flusser is once again turned to in his assertion that gestures are non-causal (2014, p. 3). This becomes a lynchpin for understanding

how gestures emerge; as being non-causal does not mean that a gesture is without cause, but rather that a cause is no longer required to understand a gesture. Through this, the gesture and the apparatus are consolidated into a singular phenomenon: not an apparatus and a gesture, but an assembling.

1.6.5 Précis for Chapter 6: The gestural assembling of the body within the selfie through perceptual affects

Following the extended discussion on apparatus and the novel selfie interface in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, the reading of phenomenology and gesture presented in Chapter 4 and through the case studies of Chapter 5, Chapter 6 introduces the concept of gestural assembling. It provides readings of assemblage-theory illustrating how it can be used as a possible method to navigate the complexities of the phenomenology of the apparatus. The reading of phenomenological methods—which allow for a novel understanding of gesture—and apparatus theory—that understand how knowledge and power are situated through devices—lead to an encounter, or interfacing, of the body and the apparatus that is referred to as a gestural assembling.

Principally, assemblage is research into how various heterogeneous components become organised or arranged. However, the theoretical and methodological framework of assemblage is developed through the research of philosopher Manuel DeLanda (2016) who provides a practical and pragmatic way of reading assemblage. The value in DeLanda is how he provides a vocabulary for discussing “assemblages of assemblages” (2016, p. 140-143). He contends with this in his work on assemblage theory, where, amongst other things, the concept of the individual event of the assemblage is examined. He examines the parameters of the various relations of an assembling in an extended discussion on how an assemblage is arguably always *becoming unique* and what this means for the existence and possibility of the assembling itself. The term *haecceity* is adopted from scholastic philosophy to define each instance in which an assemblage assembles (from the Latin *haecceitas*, which translates as thisness) as each instance of how the selfie is assembled is unique. As haecceity, the assemblage obtains a thisness (DeLanda, 2016, p. 140-143), and the thisness of each selfie—the adjustment of parameters that results in its uniqueness—becomes an event.

However, this is further extended through affect theory as affect theory allows for an effective method of conceptualising the *body* within the assemblage. In other words, the collapse into gesture experienced between the apparatus and the body is read as an assembling; and this assembling, when examined through theories of affect, can be understood as an assembling of *perceptual haecceities*.

Assemblage is presented as an arrangement of relationships. However, only once read in terms of affect-theory can this arrangement be understood in terms of an organisation of perception. To demonstrate this, a reading of the concept of the “body-without-an-image” (Massumi, 2002, pp. 57-62) is provided as a framework to understand these complex dynamics. Through this methodological conceptualising, it can then be demonstrated how the selfie gives the body-without-an-image an image: not image in how it creates a photograph, but image *in how perception is made possible through how the body is assembled through its gesturing*. However, this image is always short of actual, and it is this that is shown to be the fundamental desubjectifying force of the apparatus.

1.6.6 Précis for Chapter 7: Selfie: a critical examination of a desubjectifying perceptual haecceity

Chapter 7 is an extensive discussion of a single selfie (Figure 1.1, reproduced as Figure 7.1). While this selfie is presented as an image, it is discussed as a phenomenon in which various affects are illustrated to have led to its assembling. It is ultimately shown as a process of desubjectification that occurs at the level of perception, and the individual captured in the image is shown to become desubjectified.

This organisation of perception, it is argued, is not only an organisation of what is made visible but also an organisation of what is made invisible through this selfie. While it is apparent then how the myth of invisibility first introduced is produced through the gesturing of the body, the novel selfie interface is returned to, and this relationship between the mirror and camera is rearticulated once again. It is shown that discussions of the body and the mirror (such as Lacan’s essay on the mirror stage) are wholly inadequate when navigating the mirror and the device.

Therefore, the assembling is detailed through the critical vocabulary offered by Massumi and introduced in Chapter 6. The processes of quasi-corporeality, proprioception, and viscerality (2002, pp.

57-62) exemplify the desubjectification of the individual, and this desubjectification is readily shown.

However, what is expanded beyond this subjectification is how the glitch reemphasises this desubjectification and does not allow for any piercing of the digital veil. Rather the glitch, as a postdigital affect, is shown to be part and parcel of the desubjectification process consolidating this selfie, body, digital, etc., into a singular instance in which the selfie taker erroneously believes themselves to be human.

Following the work of these chapters, a brief conclusion is provided to reiterate the contribution, discuss limitations of these findings, and present areas of future research and generalisation.

2 THE NOVEL SELFIE INTERFACE AND THE MYTH OF INVISIBILITY PERVADING THE MIRROR

2.1 The role of the mirror in the popularity of the selfie

An examination of the mirror is imperative for understanding how the body is organised in terms of the selfie because the beginnings of this organisation—this gesture that has come to be called selfie—is found when an individual approaches a mirror. It was not exclusively the availability of digital cameras that led to the popularity of the selfie but rather, as shall be evidenced, the availability of the mirror.

In terms of the selfie, the mirror can be approached in several ways, two of which are examined here.

On the one hand, selfies in which a mirror is photographed capturing an individual and their reflection (colloquially: mirror selfies). On the other hand, selfies where the mirror is created by the mobile device through the combination of a front-facing camera (FFC) and large, high-resolution screen (the novel selfie interface, see fig. 1.20, Chapter 1). To note, the two modes of selfie mentioned in this paragraph, the mirror selfie and the novel selfie interface, are not the only methods in which a novel relationship between the (mobile phone) camera and the mirror is created. There are instances where a photo is taken “selfie-style”. When an individual asks to be photographed selfie-style, they expect that they are photographed by someone else using the FFC so they can see themselves in the mirror created.⁸ There is another mode where both the camera of the mobile phone and the mirror are removed from the equation (referred to as a “fake mirror selfie”, see Midkiff, 2021): an individual holds up a phone as if to point it at a mirror and is photographed by a second camera in this pose. Lastly, it bears mention that young children (aged around three to four years) have been said to refer to mirrors as cameras.⁹

However, all these relationships between individuals, mirrors and cameras are only anecdotal and require further research beyond the ambit of this thesis. This chapter exclusively investigates the mirror selfie and the novel selfie interface, with attention especially paid to the novel selfie interface as it is this method of selfie-taking that reveals complications in the relationship between the body and the device

⁸ This anecdote was shared by a documentary filmmaker and artist who noticed the phenomena while filming in Surat in the western Indian state of Gujarat.

⁹ This anecdote was shared by both various peers and family members. At least four incidents were reported.

and how an image of the body is informed by this relationship. In short, the novel selfie interface reveals how something can be present but not apparent: selfies captured through this mode reveal an *invisibility* when examined closely.

Practically, the chapter begins with an examination of the mirror selfie. It examines some of the existing literature on how this has been theorised, paying attention to the rise in mobile, digital photography.

The mobile phone and its convergence with the digital camera, it is argued, resulted in extensive discussion on what is deemed picture-worthy (Okabe and Ito, 2006). Increases in banal and vernacular photographs inevitably resulted in more photographs of individuals in mirrors (mirror selfies).

However, while this may be the case, there is also an argument to be made that this mode of selfie-taking is part of an existing genealogy of self-portraiture in which an artist captures their likeness using a specular surface as an intermediary in which they can see themselves. The question resulting from this discussion is whether these mirror selfies are photographs of mirrors that happen to reflect the photographer or photographs of individuals posed before these specular surfaces. It is argued that there is no easy answer, and this is evidenced through readings of Ilse Bing's *Self-Portrait with Leica* (1931) and Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656) that reveal that a mirror within an image complicates how such images are received. This is shown as the mirror creates space before it and behind its surface. The importance of acknowledging this space is that it requires the body to be organised within it, and therefore it is posited that the use of the mirror is always gestural.

Once this has been established, the chapter turns to the novel selfie interface. Unlike the mirror of the mirror selfie that is apparent in the image, there is no mirror depicted within these selfies, and the mirror becomes inferred through the process. This change, it is shown, results in the mirror and camera operating simultaneously as a single image creating device (as discussed in Section 1.3). There exists extensive literature discussing this combination within selfie studies, and the chapter provides further detail to the review of this literature introduced in the introduction (notably Tiidenberg, 2014, 2015, 2016; Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015; Warfield, 2014a, 2014b, 2017a, 2017b; Warfield et al., 2016; Walker, 2005; Walker-Rettberg, 2014). This review leads to the central research problem of this chapter: why is the mirror not interrogated within this literature?

It is posited that this is a result of an invisibility implicit in the mirror: not an actual invisibility, but rather an invisibility that takes the form of a myth. The use of the word myth here follows Roland Barthes, who defines myth as a type of speech that “transforms history into nature” (1972, p. 128) as statements of myth are generally accepted and not needing any explanation: axiomatic beliefs that can be presented without evidence. It is shown within this chapter that a lack of acknowledgement of the mirror is naturalised in speech and discussions surrounding these surfaces. The mirror, it is ultimately shown, is predicated with *a myth of invisibility*. This invisibility is central to how the mirror is understood and exacerbated within the selfie process. The lack of interrogation of the mirror within the reviewed literature from selfie studies confirms this.

Following the review of this literature from selfie studies, this chapter presents research that was conducted into how the myth of invisibility tainting the mirror has come to be perpetuated. It is ultimately posited that there are two primary reasons why the mirror has come to be understood as invisible. Firstly, the mirror became invisible through ubiquity; these surfaces have become so commonplace that they no longer require acknowledging. Secondly, the mirror is understood as invisible as it is a technology of light and, being that Western thought is a photology (Derrida, 1978a, p. 31; Miles, 2005, p. 335), what is reflected in the mirror has no relation to the surface itself. Both points are detailed within this chapter.

In summation, by synthesising existing literature and research on the mirror, it is demonstrated that the mirror has disappeared as a ubiquitous technology of light.

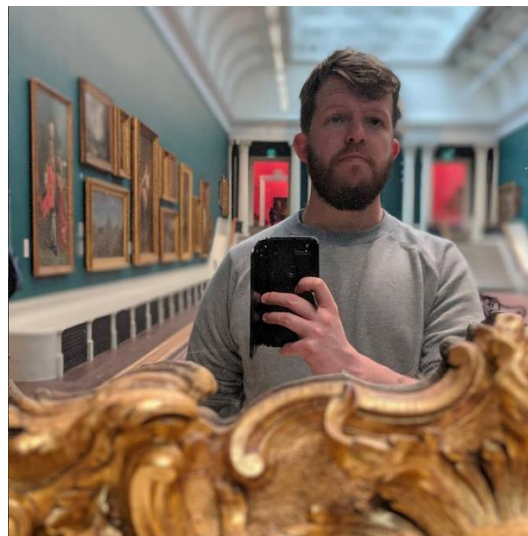
This finding then makes it imperative that the mirror is returned to in a new light if the selfie and the gesture of the selfie are to be understood. While the presented history allows the mirror to be returned to as an ontic, physical object and not an invisible, mystical surface, this does not accommodate the complexity of this surface and is a launching pad for further discussion. It is therefore suggested that the mirror is an image-producing device, and as an image-producing device, it is subject to a vast array of social codes and programs (Flusser, 2000; see also van der Meulen, 2010, pp. 193-195). The mirror can be conceptualised as an apparatus, and therefore it is suggested that this framework is useful to

understand the mirror and, in turn, the mirror within the novel selfie interface. This then is how the chapter concludes: the mirror is an apparatus and should therefore be read as such. (The methodological considerations required for investigating an apparatus and its organisation are presented in Chapter 3).

2.2 The complexities of creating an image by directing an image capturing device towards a specular surface: the mirror selfie

To execute a mirror selfie a digital camera (normally of a mobile- or smartphone) is directed towards a specular surface in a bedroom, in a bathroom, or in a public space. A photographic self-portrait is created, and the photograph produced depicts the mirror, the individual, and the device used to capture the image (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1
A mirror selfie



Note. A mirror selfie captured in the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin (2019). The mirror is evidenced by the large, ornate, giltwood frame that is apparent in the bottom third of the image. The maker of the frame is unidentified, but it is one of five large mirrors commissioned by Joseph Leeson for his homes (National Gallery of Ireland n.d.). [photograph] by Berkland, 2019b, (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BxxU4qungIL/>)

Such a practice (directing an image capturing device towards a mirror) is by no means a contemporary one. The mirror is undoubtedly the supreme technology for allowing an individual to see their

reflection and has been used as an intermediary device to capture reflections—in a variety of media—for millennia. For example, reports occur in Plato’s *The Republic* (c. 380 BC) of painters who turn “a mirror round and round... would soon enough make... [them]self” (Hall, 2014, p. 15). Further, artists place mirrors before or alongside their canvas before engaging in painting, and there are the meta-self-portraits exploring the relationship between an artist and mirror in painting such as Gump’s *Self-portrait* (1646) and Norman Rockwell’s *Triple Self-portrait* (1960), showing both the canvas, mirror, and artist in the final piece which illustrates “the hidden delusiveness of vision [where] the eyes in the artist’s portraits betray the discrepancy between the reflected and the painted portrait” (Varga, 2008, p. 163). Notably, Gump’s painting was disseminated as a meme across social media with the caption: “Trying to take a selfie in 1646” (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2
A selfie meme

Trying to take a selfie in 1646
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can be found in the Lanchester Library, Coventry
University.

Note. Hewes Library, 2020, <https://twitter.com/HewesLibrary/status/1333912274948427777/photo/1>

An individual using a mirror to capture an image of themselves is by no means novel, and certainly not particular to the mirror selfie inarguably “because an artist cannot see [their] own face [and] a mirror makes it possible for the artist to create a likeness of [their] own appearance without recourse to a picture of [their] own face” (Wilson, 2012, p. 58). The mirror selfie is, therefore, a moment within a genealogy of the representational arts whereby “photographing [themselves] in a mirror, the photographer can simultaneously operate the camera and act as [their] own model, but the resulting

image will inevitably include a representation of the camera” (Miller, 1998, p. 184). The representation of the camera (and inevitably the mirror) within such images results in a complicated but “particular kind of address to the viewer that links the viewer with the image, in a continuum of real and depicted space” (Williamson, 2008, p. 133). However, for this very reason, mirrors “occupy a symbolic and semi-mythical status in the history of the representational arts, as objects *that can perfectly replicate* [emphasis added] appearances or create virtual doubles of real objects” (Wilson, 2012, p. 58). Mirror self-portraits are simultaneously images of mirrors and images of reflections.

With this being the case, it is key to consider how the mirror selfie is distinct from this genealogy of self-portraiture. Simply, the image capturing device (here a digital camera) has converged with the networked mobile phone. The digital camera and the mobile phone are inseparable, and this has led to some fundamental, ontological changes within photography (see Sutton, 2009). What is of key importance is that a mobile- or smartphone is regarded as a “lifeline” (see Wilska, 2003, pp. 448-449) for many and as of the early 21st century this lifeline has become riveted to the digital camera.

Therefore, while an individual does not require a camera, they do require a phone; but it has become impossible to separate the two. This has resulted in myriad changes to photography, and what is noteworthy here is how what has been deemed picture-worthy (Okabe & Ito, 2006) has fundamentally changed. The rise of the connectivity introduced through the mobile phone, and the seemingly limitless storage space to contain photographs, has propagated ostensibly banal and/or vernacular photography (see Burgess, 2007; Koskinen, 2004; Nightingale, 2007; Okabe & Ito, 2004, 2006; Peterson, 2009).

Lasén and Edgar Gómez Cruz discuss the rise of self-portraiture within this practice and argue that “[t]hanks to digital photography the gesture of pointing the camera or the phone at oneself is becoming common” (2009, p. 206). However, it is Tifentale and Manovich who present the importance of the mirror within such practice. The role of the mirror was observed in their massive selfie project titled *Sellicity* in which a dataset of selfies ($n = 120,000$) was collected from five major cities: New York, Bangkok, Berlin, Sao Paulo, and Moscow. Within their findings, a mirror is the site of private self-reflection, and they cite art historian Jean-François Chevrier who wrote that the “most intimate place for narcissistic contemplation, the room with the mirror—a bathroom for example—becomes in this context

the most common of places, where every distinction of the self is in the end abolished” (1986, p. 10).

Tifentale and Manovich argue (2015, p. 9) that the selfie took this private act of looking in a mirror and made it public through the mobile phone.

There are seemingly two discrete phenomena colliding here: first, the art historical practise of self-portraiture in which a mirror is required to see the face or, at the very least, the body or disposition of a subject (for example, the paintings mentioned above or Bing’s *Self-portrait with Leica* (1931), Figure 2.3, discussed below). Second, the everyday practice of self-reflection that just happens to have become captured because everything is captured (the term self-reflection referring here not necessarily to moments of deep introspection, but plainly to those moments in which a body is reflected in a mirror). The question, therefore, is whether the mirror selfie is an intentional mode of self-portraiture or, arguably, just happenstance as far as individuals have phones that can take pictures and mirrors are everywhere. This distinction can only be resolved with a more complicated question of *what* is being photographed in each instance: is it the mirror being photographed in this practice, or is it the reflection in the mirror being photographed?

It is posited here that it is only through gesture that such questions can be resolved as far as it is this disposition of the individual that reveals how a relationship with a mirror is organised. Or, in other words, the body before the mirror needs to be figured before the role of the mirror can be effectively articulated (in the selfie, and arguably in visual culture as a discipline). However, this relationship is remarkably complex and to demonstrate this, images of mirrors are worth interrogating. Two will be discussed here in this regard: the first is Bing’s photograph *Self-portrait with Leica* (1931), and the second is Velázquez’s painting *Las Meninas* (1656). While neither of these images are contemporary to the selfie, the methodological justification for examining these images is to better understand the mirror and its ability to place the body in relation to it. In other words, instead of using the mirror to reflect the artist, in both instances, the mirror is used to reflect the viewer without providing their reflection and, by implication, positioning their body in relation to the image in a particular way. What the mirror does in the instance of each of these images is create a space in which the viewer must position themselves. The

mirror does not reflect the body, but the mirror reminds the body that it can be reflected if it occupies the space before it, and therefore this becomes a discussion on gesture.

It is acknowledged that this method of analysis (in both cases) is what art historians would categorise as being “*oeuvre*-independent” (Wicks, 2010, p. 270) and therefore an unsatisfactory method for interpreting these works (see, notably, Snyder, 1985). However, the objective here is not to interpret the meaning of the work but rather to use these examples to initiate a discussion on how the body becomes organised in a particular manner in relation to the mirror.

2.2.1 The heterotopic space of Bing’s *Self-portrait with Leica*

Figure 2.3 *Self-portrait with Leica*

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Note. Bing, 1931, <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/16.2005/>

In Bing’s *Self-portrait with Leica* (1931), sometimes titled *Self-portrait in Mirrors* (MoMA, 2019), there is a selection of gazes at play, and this is possible because of the various mirrors used to compose the complex image (the term “gaze” not only means to look but to situate the viewer as both subject and object of the photograph). Firstly, there is evidence of at least two mirrors within the photograph: the

smaller mirror which the viewer sees immediately sits to the left of the frame and reflects Bing's profile and her Leica camera. It creates a *mise en abyme* revealing her hand that is clasping the shutter release cable of the camera, evidencing that it is Bing taking the photo. In this smaller mirror, the artist is facing out the left of the frame. Bing's reflection is photographing something the viewer cannot see as it sits out of frame to the left of the photograph.

The other, larger mirror is hidden and only evidenced by the bevel running down the length of the left edge of the photograph. What this bevel reveals to the viewer is that they are looking at a mirror that occupies the entire frame: the viewer is looking at Bing's reflection, and the viewer is looking at a mirror as a result. This mirror contains the smaller mirror of Bing's profile, but it also contains Bing herself looking directly out at the viewer. Of course, as this is a mirror, she is looking at both the viewer, herself and her reflection. The viewer happens to occupy the space within the mirror, and therefore her gaze intersects with the gaze of the individual viewing the photograph. By looking at herself directly, she has provided the viewer with the opportunity to make direct eye contact with herself as the artist while also filling the role of her reflection.

This implies a second viewer both within and outside of the picture—the one that the reflection in the smaller mirror *mise en abyme* is looking at. There are ultimately two reflections of Bing, viewing two implied viewers who are in some ways being photographed. Bing here is revealing the specular property of the reflective surface, as well as the role said surface has in creating *space*. It is key to note is that her face remains behind the camera. Bing is ostensibly trying to see what the camera sees, whilst also seeing herself in the mirror as she refuses the aid of the viewfinder of the Leica. She straddles a space here, as she remains behind the camera as a photographer while also looking beyond it as someone looking into the mirror. Bing reflects the complex dichotomy of posing before a camera and posing before a mirror simultaneously (which becomes a central discussion within selfie studies and discussed in Section 2.2 in detail).

Such an unfolding space can be referred to as heterotopic. The term heterotopia is a term coined by Foucault, and it is the concept that allows for the articulation of spaces that exist beyond or outside of

private or public spaces defined in terms of a social institution or apparatus. Foucault's discussion (1986) of such a space emerges in his distinction between a utopia (literally a non-place) and a heterotopia (literally an other-place). He uses the mirror as an example of such a space and writes:

The mirror is, above all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives me own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed towards me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place the I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. (1986, p. 24)

In being heterotopic, the mirror is an-other space because it is at once a space that is elsewhere (over there, in the mirror), and at the same time, it is present. This, then, becomes one of the primary allowances the camera affords to the mirror: it allows an individual to cross its portal-like threshold to the place beyond its solid, silvered surface. In this regard, the camera, when directed towards a mirror, is no longer an image capturing device, but an interface (Galloway, 2012, p. 30) that can be crossed through; a threshold to be spanned. In many ways, the camera is liberated by this heterotopia. This is what is posited by the selfie literature reviewed in Section 2.2 and what is shown to be wholly false by this thesis.

2.2.2 The impossible space of the mirror of Velázquez's *Las Meninas*

Figure 2.4
Las Meninas

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Note. Velázquez, 1656, Museo del Prad.

The intricate matrix of looking and being looked upon, including the things that are hidden and implied within Bing's image, are not unlike Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, which is arguably one of "the most written about paintings of all time" (Jacobs, 2015, p. 49). This is due in no small part to the mirror that occupies the near centre of the image. This mirror has led to a vast body of critical literature from philosophers (Foucault, 1970b, pp. 6-8; Searle, 1973, pp. 483-485) attempting to unravel the supposed paradox implied by the mirror, or empirical art historians rebutting such readings (Snyder, 1985, pp. 544-551; Wicks, 2010, pp. 262-265) with no agreement on the position of the mirror in relation to the viewer. The philosophical analysis of the image uses the mirror as the site of various paradoxes as the viewer occupies the position of the figures reflected in the mirror (King Philip IV and Queen Mariá

Anna), and this results in a cascade of unfolding relations between the interior and exterior of the image (such as those discussed in regard to *Self-portrait with Leica*). While the philosophical analysis is attempting to discuss the fundamental change in representation and perception between classical and modern periods of thought (or *epistemes*, see Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982), research on the painting has intrigued scholars and been the centre of controversy for some time; whilst also launching a parade of new interest into the mysteries and paradoxes of the painting.

The value of examining this painting in relation to a (novel selfie) interface that developed nearly 350 years later is in once again asking the questions: “what then was the picture of” (Searle 1980, p. 488) and how has it used paradoxes to question the nature of pictorial representation? Such questions led critic Joel Snyder to dismiss the writings of Foucault and Searle and their use of paradox to illicit meaning by stating that paradoxes are boring (Jacobs, 2015, p. 49) and that “paradox combines the worst features of tautology and contradiction: it is both wretchedly true and wretchedly false” (Snyder, 1985, p. 551).

While Foucault’s examination did still receive further attention from art historians (see Bryson, 1988; Alpers, 1995; Greslé, 2006), the painting instead became an entry point for a larger discussion on modernity and representation and—importantly for this study—space.

For Foucault, this image is ostensibly used as a point of origin for an extended change in representations. Foucault’s principal methods of philosophical enquiry both operate in terms of a historical (or more specifically a historiographic) trajectory in which histories are written to present a history of a thing. Initially, this mode of inquiry was referred to as an archaeology but would later be deemed a genealogy following the dynamic influences of power in terms of the apparatus (discussed in Section 3.2.3). *Las Meninas* becomes a zero point or origin point for the beginning of this discursive history, and while it is ostensibly the origins of the discursive subject—desperate to see themselves in the mirror of a king or queen—what *Las Meninas* ultimately does is show a moment when the mirror possibly first becomes invisible. This invisibility results in the mirror and the painting emptying out all meaning through the volume of perceptions, between artist, mirror, canvas, figures, gallery, interior and exterior et al. To stand before this (painting of) a mirror is to occupy a space where meaning is not required because all meaning is within the mirror.

What is this space before the mirror? It is a manner of making the mirror invisible, and this is important within these images. This space before the mirror allows the mirror to reflect what is placed before it and, in many ways, this is the great illusion of the mirror: its two spaces; the one before it that the body exists in and the one beyond it that echoes the body back. However, the distinction between the space within the mirror and the space before the mirror is made apparent in *Las Meninas*, *Self-portrait with Leica*, and mirror selfies as the mirrors are readily visible. It is a surface with a frame, and in all instances, an intricate matrix of looking occurs, and investigations are required. There are some noticeable similarities between Foucault's explication of *Las Meninas* and examinations of where Bing is looking in her photograph. In the same way that Velázquez's representation of himself is "staring at a point to which, even though it is invisible, we, the spectators, can easily assign an object, since it is we, ourselves, who are at that point" (Foucault, 1970b, p. 4); an identical point emerges in Bing's photograph and it creates a "matter of pure reciprocity; we are looking at a picture in which the painter is in turn looking out at us... only in so far as we occupy the same position as [their] subject" (Foucault, 1970b, p. 4). Yet, in being able to see the mirror as an object within these images—as a specular *mise en abyme*—the viewer can determine that the mirror is there. The mirror is visible and apparent.

2.3 The complex array of images created by the novel selfie interface

For this reason, the mirror selfie operates in a fundamentally different manner to selfies in which the device is used as a mirror and camera simultaneously as the novel selfie interface. Once the mirror and camera became composed into a single device there is a distinct shift in the relationship between an individual and the image capturing device as all the complex lines, paradoxes and relations became compressed in a single line of looking. As mentioned in Section 1.3, there exists extensive discussion on this topic and, within this literature: on the one hand, the camera is understood as an object that creates an image that carries with it a wide variety of social codes and proper means of use. As such, it is argued that the image created by the camera is constructed and worthy of distrust and interrogation. The mirror, in opposition to this, is a surface that provides a space that reveals whatever is situated before it, and with this, it is argued to have revealing and supposedly truth-telling properties as it produces a

fundamentally different image of the body as the constructed one produced by the camera: a heterotopic space beyond the auspice of the camera-apparatus.

Methodologically, a possible means of conceptualising these two distinct images is through the work of Flusser. In his research on the production of contemporary images (albeit during his time of writing), he talks of two categories of image: one which he refers to directly as “image” (2000, pp. 8-13) or “traditional image” (2011, p. 6), and a second that is referred to as a “technical image” (2000, pp. 14-16). The first category, the traditional image, Flusser describes as “reductions of the four dimensions of space and time to the two surface dimensions”: an encoding of phenomena into two dimensions (2000, p. 8). The specifics of this traditional image are difficult, and at times near-mystical, as he describes them as having a “magical nature” (2000, p. 9) insofar they are not fixed events but rather are described as being in a state of constant mediation between the world and human beings (2000, pp. 9-10). This traditional image is contrasted with the technical image. The technical image is not a representation of phenomena but a representation of what Flusser refers to as programs as far as the technical image is an image produced by *apparatus*. The definition of apparatus used in Flusser’s thesis appears to be borrowed explicitly from the work of Foucault (1970a; 1998), although this is difficult to confirm as Flusser refuses the use of citations. Regardless, the term apparatus is a complex one as far as it does not refer to an object or gadget, but rather how a systematic series of codes, statements and programs have come to be arranged within a system of relations through the Foucauldian framework of discourse, power, and knowledge. For example, a camera is not an apparatus in and of itself but becomes an apparatus in how it is used and how it provides the means for its use through certain understandings of its functions and practices (knowledge) and institutional networks (power).

While the dynamics of these programs (here meaning social codes or arrangements of knowledge and power—the stuff of the apparatus) will be examined in more detail elsewhere (Section 3.3), it is worth considering these two types of image (traditional and technical) in context of selfie research. While not explicitly stated, this segment of selfie research is plausibly arguing that this novel camera-mirror interface produces both Flusserian images simultaneously. On the one hand, the digital FFC produces a

technical image (insofar it is a camera), while on the other, the digital mirror simply shows what is placed before it, resulting in an image of phenomena: a traditional image.

However, this is not the case. While it follows that this novel interface does have the capacity to produce these two categories of image simultaneously, this literature fails to consider the *mirror as apparatus* and, therefore, a producer of technical image. This is, by and large, due to how the mirror has become subject to what can be understood of as a myth of invisibility, obfuscating its surface, in turn, hiding and obscuring the programs leading to how it produces an image. Because the mirror is ubiquitous to the point of triviality and a technology of the reflection of light (as shall be demonstrated throughout this chapter), the mirror passes unseen.

2.3.1 Review of extant literature on the novel selfie interface

One of the earliest examinations of the combination of mirror and mobile phone camera can be found in an article by Walker-Rettberg (Walker, 2005), who engaged in some preliminary investigations into the act that would later come to be called the selfie. The article, titled “Mirrors and shadows: the digital aestheticization of oneself”, offered some initial thoughts on “online photographic self-portraiture with self-representations in weblogs and the creation of visual avatars” (2005, p. 1). Walker-Rettberg mentioned how the mobile phone “certainly [made] taking self-portraits easier than conventional cameras did [as her] mobile phone even [had] a tiny concave mirror placed next to the camera lens” (Walker, 2005, p. 1). This small concave mirror is important to note, and it became a common attribute of mobile phones released around that period (2005-2007). Popular models such as the Nokia 5300 and the Blackberry Pearl 8100 had small concave mirrors alongside the cameras of their phones. However, an experience of this mirror is by no means an effective reflection: the images reflected are small, tight, and distorted. Yet, a relationship was established in these antecedent devices. Within the arrangement of the form factor of the mobile phone, the mirror was in the pocket of an individual attached to a camera, and therefore self-portraiture was practised with a newfound convenience. One could use the phone as both a mirror and a camera simultaneously.

For Walker-Rettberg, this concave mirror allowed for her to better approximate her final photo. The mirror here is a viewfinder for the individual capturing their image as it is an intermediary surface upon which their face can be seen. Walker-Rettberg's work is prescient and alludes to development in the novel interface that would lead to widespread selfie adoption. What is projected here is that it is not only the convenience of the mobile phone camera that would lead to selfie-taking but the relationship between the camera and the mirror. This moment was a progenitor of later selfie behaviour as an individual no longer needed to direct their mobile phone camera towards a mirror on a bathroom wall (as discussed in Sections 2.2). It was the establishment of a novel interface.

Writing nearly a decade later, in her book *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology: How We Use Selfies, Blogs and Wearable Devices to See and Shape Ourselves* (2014), Walker-Rettberg noted that the development in mobile phone technology had changed the way people took such self-portraits with their mobile devices (which at this time had become commonly referred to as selfies). In the decade between her earlier essay and her book, the small concave mirror of the mobile phone had been replaced by the expansive, high-resolution touchscreen that was coupled with an FFC. The mirror and the camera were no longer separate, discrete entities but instead imbricated into the same device that allowed an individual "to control the way [they were] represented to a far greater degree than in a photobooth or holding an analogue camera up to a mirror" (Walker-Rettberg, 2014, p. 12).

Walker-Rettberg cites two researchers in her book who also explore the relationship between the selfie, and the mirror, and the camera: Kate Warfield and Katrin Tiidenberg. Both these authors have written at length on the selfie and given considerable attention to this novel interface. The broader scope of their research examines the selfie through various theoretical methods, including visual post-structuralism, phenomenology, and feminist and gender theory. Warfield's work is more focused on the creation of the self through online image sharing (particularly in young people), and Tiidenberg's research is focused on the body and embodiment concerning the notion, potential, and possibilities of digital intimacies. About this interface, as Walker-Rettberg says, both researchers argue that the mirror adds a unique dimension to the selfie that is novel in digital, online identity creation. In short, for Warfield and Tiidenberg, the mirror is a viewfinder that does not exclusively direct the lens of the

camera towards an object but also *reveals* due to its reflective properties as it is the (re)production of the phenomenal traditional image and not through the machinations of the technical image (to once again adopt Flusser's vocabulary).

The digital mirror creates an interface between the body and the camera that is extensively examined by Warfield in particular. In a 2014 lecture, it is asserted that:

No other medium until digital photography permitted you to see yourself in real time on a front-facing screen. A mirror lets you see yourself and not record your image. With smartphones and digital cameras on a pivot screen you have access to a technology which is at once a mirror and a visual recording device. Because of this you can watch yourself move and at that perfect moment nab the image that you desire.

For Warfield, there is an indivisible relationship between the mirror and the camera that is unique to the selfie as the device lets an individual see themselves before capturing their image. Warfield asserts that the arrangement of this interface has a profound effect on the "relationship... between technology and self as if the technology is causing more self-reflection or analysis" (Warfield, 2014) on the part of the user. As she says at the end of her lecture, this means that these "are not photos of disembodied objects, rather ... photos of embodied subjects" (Warfield, 2014).

An extension into how this interface allows for the development of images of embodied subjects is further discussed in "MirrorCameraRoom: the gendered multi-(in)stabilities of the selfie" (2017a). Here, Warfield interviews four participants, and it is noted that in the "process of setting up the interview room to take [selfies], every one of the four young women used the cellphone as a mirror: to fluff hair, check out angles, and touch up makeup" (Warfield, 2017a, p. 82). Warfield continues and argues that "to posit that the mirror was used not simply to look, but rather to look, assess, and materially alter one's appearance through a form of material and discursively gendered form of foreplay" (Warfield, 2017a, p. 82). Most crucial to note in this discussion of the novel selfie interface is that it requires that notions of authenticity are re-negotiated by participants through the relationship developed within this interface as "the participants sought... authenticity [and] drew on words like 'real' and not 'fake'" (2017a, p. 86). The authenticity offered by this interface, Warfield argues, is afforded by

the relationship between the camera and mirror. Warfield does not use a Flusserian vocabulary, but this authenticity is arguably made possible as the image in the mirror is not a technical, constructed one, but rather a traditional one, and therefore the interface becomes incredibly more complex. It is defined as “multiple consolidated technologies in one device: a mirror, a camera, and a door” (2017a, p. 83). In short, the mirror within this interface offers authenticity to the selfie-taker that was not available in mediated, technical photography as the camera is still the site of various social codes and programs. The mirror, for Warfield, is not.

A similar argument emerges in “Selfies, image and the re-making of the body”, by Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz (2015), as they distinguish posing for a photograph and posing before a mirror. This preliminary research is then developed further following another study by Rebecca Coleman where Tiidenberg and Cruz note that—according to Coleman—her research “participant’s photographs were ‘images of their bodies in the past’ (2009, p. 88) ... [while] mirror images involve ‘the possibility of multiple presents’” (Coleman, 2009, p. 95). Therefore—given the novel interface—the selfie “can simultaneously do both” (Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015, p. 82) as the combined posing for a photograph and posing before a mirror is implicit within the process of selfie-taking. In the study, they examine the selfies of nine participants (aged 21–51, from the USA, Australia, Canada). They look at one participant (Rachel) and her experience of taking selfies:

We see that Rachel—by taking a selfie—captures her body in a way that allows her to have a specific understanding of how her body looks, that produces a body that looks good. Concurrently her ability to see herself changing and moving in the webcam’s screen, as well as the fact that she (like most self-shooters) takes many images in one ‘sitting’, makes selfies seem more *accurate* [emphasis added] (in terms of representing what her body might look like or is capable of looking like) than photographic images taken by others. (2015, p. 89)

The word “accurate” is key when contrasted with the photographic images taken by others (as Walker-Rettberg noted: photographs of objects). Within this argumentation, the relationship between the mirror and the selfie allows for a representation that is more accurate (or authentic, as Warfield states) as the reflecting mirror is supposedly more honest. In both of their respective research, the mirror is associated with the depiction of phenomena, not technical construction. It is an element within the

interface that reveals the truth in a matter-of-fact way that the posed performativity before the camera lacks.

To reiterate this once again through Flusser's words, within this literature, there is a tension created between the technical image (of the camera) and the supposedly traditional image (of the mirror).

However, such a reading underplays the mirror and its machinations. To note, there is substantial work within this literature scrutinising the camera; however, there is exiguous work produced on the mirror.

Walker produces some literature on the mirror discussing it in terms of Lacan (who discussed the role of the mirror in the creation of the ego), Laura Mulvey (who examines the cinema-as-mirror) and the mirror-stage (2005, pp. 2-3), and the mirror role in creating the self (discussions of which are returned to in Section 6.6). However, within the totality of this literature, the mirror is discussed but not readily nor substantially appraised.

Arguably, this is by and large due to how a mirror is talked about, understood, and used; but most importantly, this is a result of a myth of invisibility that has permeated the tain of the mirror's silvered surface.

2.4 The myth of invisibility and its perpetuation through the ubiquity of the mirror surface and the photology of Western thought

The mirror offers a host of challenges as an object of analysis; the most central of those is the tendency to not see it. When looking into a mirror it is easy to become lost in its specular reflection and often forget how it is framed, hung, positioned within a home, and the uses this specific object has. The difficulty is furthered as the history of the mirror is often a history of its relationship to something else, or the mirror as a sustained conceit for some form of media. For example, literature on the cinema screen as a mirror, the mirror and photography, the mirror in literature, the mirror and the selfie, and so forth. This is arguably a result of how the mirror has become understood through the way it is talked about, which has ostensibly only emerged in the last century. The mirror is approached through a discourse surrounding its surface, and through this discourse, the surface of the mirror has emerged as a solipsistic one: it reflects therefore it is. The word discourse here is defined in terms of critical theory as

a “specific form of language use shaped and determined by situational rules and context... [but] the concept is used in place of language precisely as a way of encompassing the extra-linguistic dimension of all forms of communication” (Buchanan, 2010). A more comprehensive definition of discourse will be returned to in relation to apparatus in Section 3.2.1, but for the moment it is worth noting that in being discursive this myth of invisibility is not only revealed through language but also practice; “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972b, p. 49).

Evidence of this discourse can be seen in a swathe of literature. Laura Cumming writes in *A Face to the World: On Self-Portraiture* that “mirrors are there and not there, surfaces that only become visible because and when they make other objects visible” (2009, p. 141). It is repeated by Mark Pendergrast in *Mirror Mirror: A History of the Human Love Affair with Reflection* where he says that “mirrors are meaningless until someone looks into them” (2003, p. ix). A similar sentiment is echoed by architect Hugh Jacobsen who proclaimed that a “mirror is a mirror when you can see yourself; otherwise it is an illusory means of expanding space” (in Heyne, 1996, p. 6). Fairy tale author Charles Perrault personified the mirror as the character of Oronte who has “neither heart nor memory [who] immediately forgot those whose company it had just left” (Melchior-Bonnet, 2001, p. 142). Or, as Borges wrote, in the mirror everything “happens and nothing is recorded” (1964, p. 61). That is until the rise of the daguerreotype described by Oliver Wendell Holmes as “a mirror with a memory” (Holmes, 1859, p. 739)—a metaphor that will be elaborated upon later—but a metaphor that assumes that, until the camera, the mirror could not remember. Diogenes the Cynic tells of how Socrates would carry around a mirror for this purpose: to reveal the true self of an individual. Socrates would “urge young people to look at themselves in mirrors so that, if they were beautiful, they would be worthy of their beauty, and if they were ugly, they would hide their disfigurement through learning” (Melchior-Bonnet, 2001, p. 106).

Notably, within art theory and criticism this myth proceeds. In an extensive treatise on the role of reflection in art history, “Reflections on reflections” (1962), Wolfgang M. Zucker explicates the accuracy granted by the invisibility of the mirror in two prominent instances. He writes, firstly, that, the mirror...

...does not diminish the size of the object it reflects, but its scope is much more restricted. Faithfully it reproduces what lies within its field, but it does not gather and does not concentrate. The plane *mirror cannot speak a language of its own*, therefore it cannot say more of the things than what they show in their material reality. This material reality, however, it can pronounce plainly and accurately. (1962, p. 242)

The lack of language, the inability to speak, is tantamount to understanding the invisibility suggested above. The myth is reinforced in the conclusion of the essay where Zucker continues that:

[The mirror] neither reflects nor interprets the world; it only reflects its own mathematical properties. Its meaning is order, self-begotten, self-comprising, merciless order, not good and not evil, not significant and not arbitrary—a magnificent symbol of form that no longer needs content. (1962, p. 250)

The statement that the mirror is *not significant* speaks to its lack of image. The invisibility of the mirror has led to theorising that the mirror cannot produce a sign; in other words, it has no meaning.

Semiotician Umberto Eco shares this sentiment. In his book, *A Theory of Semiotics* (1976), Eco claims that the mirror (or more specifically specular reflection) “cannot be taken as a sign” (1976, p. 7) and only produces an image defined by what is placed in front of it. In his words, the image in the mirror “does not stand *for* something else; on the contrary it stands *in front* of something else, it exists not instead of but because of the presence of that something” (1976, p. 202). For this reason, the mirror does not create a sign but a pseudo-image:

The singularity of specular reflections is demonstrated by the fact that if one tries to apply to them the schema of a communicational process many puzzling conclusions arise, p. source and addressee coincide (at least in cases where a human being looks at him or herself in the mirror); receiver and transmitter coincide; expression and content coincide since the content of the reflected image is just the image of a body, not the body itself; as a matter of fact the referent of a mirror image is pure visual matter. (1976, p. 202)

The mirror is a revealing object, here. Eco continues that this referential indexicality is necessarily present for the creation of such visual matter and therefore “cannot be used in order to lie as it relies on the thing it reveals” (1976, p. 202).

It is worth noting that even Flusser falls into this trap of invisibility (if partially), and arguably requests that the thing of the mirror be ignored entirely in favour of thinking about it philosophically as “O

espelho reflete porque não nos deixa atravessá-lo” (“the mirror reflects because it does not let us step through it], Flusser cited in Krause 2012, p. 4). He argues in his essay “Do espelho” [“The mirror”] “that the word *speculation* is closely related to mirror (*speculum*) and that the mirror undeniably reflects reality but in inverted fashion” (Finger et al., 2011, p. 116). This is worth noting to demonstrate that even with the extended writing on apparatus Flusser produces (discussed in Section 3.5 and returned to in Section 5.3), he was unable to discern the role of the mirror as one. The mirror as a thing, he affirms, is best left to “do vendedor de espelhos” ([“the people who sell mirrors”], cited in Krause 2012, p. 4).

This evidence—in Flusser’s work, and the references in the preceding paragraphs—gives an impression of what is meant by the mirror as an invisible surface. The two immediate questions this inevitably leads to are, firstly, “How did the mirror come to develop this invisibility?” and, secondly, “How does such an invisibility become so repeated, with such apparent ease, if the mirror is not invisible?”. The second question is both evidence of, and a result of, the mirror being an apparatus and this question is returned to in Chapter 3. It is the first questions that is being contended with here.

To the first question, there are two reasons why the mirror has arguably developed this invisibility. The mirror has become an increasingly ubiquitous and ever-present object and as it is so readily seen, it is no longer noticed.¹⁰ This is the first reason. The second reason is that, within the tradition of Western thought (at the very least), there is a persistent and specific conceit that defines light as truth. Therefore, readings of the mirror are plausibly a reading of how light has been understood within Western thought. Photography theorist Melissa Miles posits that light has been a longstanding metaphor for truth and knowledge: the great revealer (Miles, 2005, p. 335). She follows philosopher Jacques Derrida (1978a, p. 31) and presents Western thought as a photology for this reason, like “the light of the sun, the law of the *logos* is ambivalent and equally capable of blinding and enlightening those within its scope” (Miles, 2005, p. 330).

¹⁰ This ubiquity has become increasingly complex in how screens today no longer discrete objects are, but various elements with a boundless screenic topology. The screenic topology is a concept I developed as an extension to Vivian Sobchack’s (2016) screen-sphere and is discussed in research published for *NECUS*. See Berkland, 2019c.

2.4.1 How the development of metal and glass surfaces led to the ubiquity of the mirror

One possible definition of the mirror is a surface that can direct light in a specular way. All surfaces reflect light. In the language of physics, photons of light reflect off an object (collide with a surface) and then return to the human eye. There are two primary types of reflections to note: diffuse reflection and specular reflection. A rough or matte surface is one which is diffuse. To be diffuse is to restrict light purposefully. In both filmmaking and still photography a matte box (for example) is a tool used specially for this purpose. However, when completely smooth, a polished surface “reflects the rays of light coherently in one direction, at an angle which is equal but opposite to the one at which they arrive” (Miller, 1998, p. 15). This results in specular reflection. Historically, there are two surfaces which have most commonly been used to harness specular reflection¹¹: polished metal and silvered glass. It would be advantageous to look at some instances of both as examining the history and development of these provide evidence into how the mirror became ubiquitous.

2.4.1.1 *Metal surfaces*

The first attempts to harness specular reflection was with metal alloys of copper and tin (bronze). When such polished metals first emerged in history is difficult to specify. There is evidence of these mirrors emerging in Çatal Hüyük (Turkey) in 6200 BCE and later in 4500 BCE in the territories today known as Egypt and Iran (Pendergrast, 2003, p. 3). The Hebrews borrowed the ability to polish metal from the Egyptians and mirrors became so common that during the building of the tabernacle in the book of Exodus, Moses built a bronze washbowl (laver) and its feet from the bronze acquired from the “looking glasses of the woman assembling at the door of the tabernacle” (*The Bible*, Exodus 38:8). There is evidence of mirrors found throughout Britain and Ireland between 400 BCE and 43 CE (Giles & Joy, 2008). In these historical instances mirrors tended to be hand-held and circular, with handles of ivory that bore witness to their importance. The manufacture of metal mirrors continued throughout the next

¹¹ Still water, of course, is also capable of proving a specular reflection. The myth of Narcissus being a principal example, or Calvino’s twinned city “Valdrada on the shores of a lake, with houses all verandas one above the other, and high streets whose railed parapets look out over the water” (1978, p. 53). Also, a reflective pool is used to twin buildings such as the Taj Mahal in Agra, India or the *Miroir d’eau* [Water mirror] at the Place de la Bourse in Bordeaux, France. Water mirrors have not been considered in this thesis.

1400 years. The inventory of the Crown Jewels during the 1400s evidences a large steel mirror (Roche, 1957, p. 8). Also, an inventory of Françoise of Brittany taken in 1481 records silver mirrors in two lobster shells adorned with amber. In 1483 Charlotte of Savoy owned a polished silver mirror mounted in an amber brush.

These polished metal surfaces hosted a wide variety of uses. Some of the more exciting uses appear to be apocryphal and arise from the paraboloid curve of many polished metal surfaces to direct light to a point and focus the rays of the sun to create fire or project beams of light. Bowls of polished metals cast of bronze or gold (commonly referred to as a burning glass, a burning lens, or a burning mirror) were used to light the sacred fire of Vesta (Roche, 1957, p. 6). In the Pharos of Alexandria, a large concave mirror was used to direct the light of a fire lit at its base and most famously Archimedes used such concave mirrors to set fire to a fleet of advancing Roman ships (Pendergrast, 2003, p. 60).¹² The story of Prometheus had the titan stealing fire from the gods and returning it to humans: this fire was started with a mirror (Roche, 1957, p. 6). There is evidence of the rise of catoptromancy (a form of divination using mirrors (from *katoptron*, meaning reflection or mirror)) during antiquity. Polished metal surfaces were crossed with other reflective surfaces (notably bowls of water) to perform a variety of visions and chimaeric feats during catoptromantic rituals. Primarily the reflective surface could achieve two things: to produce oracles based on the reflection or to “invoke a god or *daimon*” (Addey, 2008, p. 32). The metal mirrors of the time were uncommon as there is “a dearth of references to the mirror [*speculum*] in Roman antiquity” (Hulkes, 2008, p. 47).

While polished metal was eventually replaced by plane glass mirrors in the 1500s, there was a resurgence of copper metal mirrors in the 1800s. These small mirrors were treated with light-sensitive silver iodide and placed into the camera obscura to create the daguerreotype. This early photography was plausibly the first successful attempt to fix the specular image of the mirrored surface. The ability to fix this memory did not divorce the metal surface from its ability to produce specular reflection, however, and instances of specular reflection remained part of the final photograph. What this creates

¹² This story is certainly apocryphal.

in the daguerreotype is a particular mystique: not specifically for those who sit and pose before the camera; but rather for those who examine the object later. Alan Trachtenberg writes of this mystique in a paper titled “Likeness as identity: Reflections on the Daguerrean mystique” (1992). He is particularly interested here in the physicality of the object: an object an individual holds that “has weight, and yet [due to its mirrored surface] behaves like a ghost” (Trachtenberg, 1992, p. 174). He writes of accounts where people looking at a daguerreotype “begins with a testimony of amazement that there seems to be nothing there, except the mirrored reflection of one’s own face” (Trachtenberg, 1992, p. 177). This peculiar happening continues even after the initial nothing is replaced with the image of the sitter. As described in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s gothic novel, *The House of Seven Gables* (1965), the daguerreotype reveals to someone holding it “a shadow of an image or an image, or indeed one’s own visage flashed back from the mirrored surface” (Trachtenberg, 1992, p. 180).

What is valuable to note here is this ghostly visage can be seen in the contemporary mobile phone: however, not through the FFC/screen interface, but instead when the phone is turned off and no light is emanating from its screen. The sleek, black surface reflects light and effectively functions as a mirror. This black mirror acts as a type of incidental, contemporary Claude glass. While it could be said that this is a glass reflection, this may not be the case. As Patricia Pisters writes one “ton of mobile phones contains 300 grams of gold; gold ore of the same weight does not contain more than ten grams of gold, often much less. Considering the fact that world-wide about two billion cell phones are sold, this gives an idea of the material resources needed and hidden in” (2016) these devices. Pisters conducted an extensive and experimental examination of the role of metal within visual culture. A complete examination of this work is beyond the scope of this project, but it is worth remembering the role of metal in the contemporary device if for no other reason than to act as a reminder that the mirror is not invisible but a material, ontic thing.

2.4.1.2 *Glass surfaces*

While metal surfaces were undoubtedly the first tools to dictate reflection, it was glass that allowed these surfaces to become ubiquitous. Today, glass is the most common surface used in the creation of

mirrors. Specifically, many glass mirrors have a planar surface although they were initially smaller and convex; recognisable in Jan van Eyck's *The Arnolfini Portrait* in 1434 and Parmigianino's *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* in 1524. The Arnolfini Portrait displays the mirror on the wall in the background of the scene, while Parmigianino's work was painted as a reflection. He mimicked the surface of the convex mirror on a turned ball of wood sliced in half. Both works are subject to serious and continuous academic debate on the meaning of their mirrors. Most notably, the Arnolfini Portrait became the focus of Erwin Panofsky's method of iconography and both his method and reading have led to a variety of critical examinations. His "Jan Van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait" published in *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* (1934) is of course central to the academic discussion of the painting. However, it has been followed by important, and critical work in Jean Baptist Bedaux's "The reality of symbols: The question of disguised symbolism in Jan van Eyck's 'Arnolfini Portrait'" (1986) and Linda Seidel's "Jan van Eyck's 'Arnolfini Portrait': Business as usual?" published in *Critical Inquiry* in 1989. Notably, in Seidel's reading the sentiments of the myth of invisibility of the mirror permeate throughout as—even in its convex and distorting form—the "reflection authenticates the reality of the event the mirror has seen; it attests here ... to the prior history of the event [that is seen by] virtue of its capacity to hold onto reflected rays, the mirror qualifies as authoritative witness to the events it attends" (1989, p. 80). Also present here is an example of the ability of light to authenticate, which was mentioned in Section 2.4, but will be detailed in Section 2.4.2.

The convex, glass mirror led to distortion, and even that of the Arnolfini portrait was "profoundly 'spotted'" (Seidel, 1989, p. 80). However, the propensity of the mirror to distort features and remain free of such pockmarks was not resolved with the development of flat, planar glass surfaces. Early planar glass mirrors were imperfect. Specular reflection during early development was warped and mirrors would often be spotted, this allowed for the mirror to be used as a form of entertainment as the abnormal and distorted shapes entertained anyone who peered into them (Melchior-Bonnet, 2001, p. 16). However, the technique was perfected between the fifteenth and seventeenth century, in either Lorraine, France or Murano, Italy. Regardless, in the seventeenth century the Venetian mirror company formed a monopoly across Europe exporting their mirrors (then expensive luxuries). Murano glass

houses revolutionised the mirror in the 17th century and “mirrors ceased to be a trinket or a toilet requisite placed upon a table; it became a means of decoration, hung on the wall like a picture” (Roche, 1957, p. 19). It is important to note that during the eighteenth century within Europe, as mirrors slowly became an ever-present aspect of the home (from trinket to furniture), this adoption was not seamless and a “certain amount of time was needed to acclimate to them ... [as] their visual effects turned the relationship between empty and full surfaces on its head and defied equilibrium” (Melchior-Bonnet, 2001, p. 144). What this ultimately means is that the adoption of the glass mirror was not only an adoption of objects in homes, but also a means of thinking about those objects and the simultaneous adoption of how those objects were to be perceived correctly: a development of a correct means of use.

The glass mirror is what allowed mirrors to become objects of virtual space that were no longer practical tools for looking, but rather surfaces that resisted their two-dimensionality. The glass mirror gave rise to the mirror room or mirror gallery as in the “middle of the eighteenth century... it occurred... to use the mirrors to double the size of rooms. While often simply a show of wealth, such galleries emerged across Europe and into Russia” (see Roche, 1957, pp. 23-28 for a detailed account of such ventures). Walls—surfaces—initially constructed to keep the outside outside were adorned with mirror plates reflecting the inside creating a domestic heterotopia. Louis XIV became so enamoured by the ability of the mirror to increase space he lined his coaches with these specular surfaces.

A detailed account of the rise of the glass mirror can be read in *The Mirror: A History* by Sabine Melchior-Bonnet (2001) and the spread of the mirror is a compelling narrative of corporate espionage, but ultimately the glass mirror led to a ubiquity of specular reflection never truly achieved by the metal mirror. Melchior-Bonnet illustrates:

Today we live with mirrors. They are no longer noted for their frames or borders that isolate and imprison the reflection, like magical parentheses in the real world. Naked, flat, implacable, and perfect, they return images of the interior to the exterior and those of the exterior to the interior, making a spectacle of everything. Seeing one’s face in the mirror each morning is as obvious to us as the act of breathing. (2001, p. 98)

The dissemination of the glass mirror is one of the prerequisites that allowed the surface of the mirror to become invisible. It no longer has specific use or direction and with this, it has become profoundly trivial as the mirror is so ubiquitous. Regardless of the use of the objects, or the clarity of the images, there is an attempt to make a purely surface-less surface with a pristine glass mirror. Consider Alice who in *Through the Looking Glass* tells her cat that beyond the mirror “there’s a room you can see through the glass that’s just the same as our drawing room” (Carroll, 1872, p. 3). The mirrored surface at this point became so clear and so concise that it ceased to exist as a surface, rampantly promoting the abovementioned myth of invisibility. It was no longer a surface that reflected light, but instead became a surface that seemingly allowed itself to be stepped through. The glass mirror became a sight of truth as it revealed the world in its crystalline if chiral, imagery. It was an accurate reduction of four-dimensional space translated onto the tain of the two-dimensional surface, easily mistaken for a technology of the traditional image.

2.4.2 How the metaphor of light as truth resulted in a photology of the mirror

However, while this ubiquity was certainly a mitigating factor in the discourse of invisibility, the photology of the mirror contributes to this invisibility, equally. As mentioned, this photology speaks to an extended and recurrent conceit of light as truth within Western philosophy and religion. Within the idiom of the English language, this is prevalent in the way of speaking: something can be brought to light, or light can be shed, cast, or thrown onto a topic (and by implication ignorance can be understood to be in the dark, and secrets are kept in the dark). Within religious texts, this metaphor is persistent: “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light” (*The Bible*, Ephesians 5:8).

An extended and comprehensive listing of this metaphor is well beyond the scope of this thesis, but its impact on how thought has developed through its auspice requires acknowledgement. A valuable resource for understanding the complete impact this photology has had on Western thought is available in Hans Blumenberg’s “Light as a metaphor for truth: At the preliminary stage of philosophical concept formation” (1993) where it is argued that the “history of metaphysics has made use of [light] in order to

give an appropriate reference to its ultimate subject matter, which can no longer be grasped in material terms... to show that there is more to the concept of Being [*des Seins*] than an empty abstraction which one could extract from beings [*dem Seienden*]" (1993, p. 31). Blumenberg contends that this has led to an extensive shift in both world-understanding and self-understanding.

Another notable examination of this metaphor (and metaphor more generally) is persistent throughout the work and writing of Derrida. His project was focused on the assumptions and tenets that stabilised and developed Western thought, of which the metaphor of light, he argues, was perhaps one of the most central. In his essay "Force and signification" he writes:

The metaphor of darkness and light (of self-revelation and self-concealment), the founding metaphor of Western philosophy as metaphysics. The founding metaphor not only because it is a photological one—and in this respect *the entire history of our philosophy is a photology*, the name given to a history of, or treatise on, light—but because it is a metaphor. (1978a, p. 31)

A fundamental thrust of Derrida's work was how thought becomes situated within binaries, and the binary of light and darkness is, for Derrida, the most central.

A specific method of speaking and talking emerges through this photology, and this same method of speaking becomes endemic of how technologies are used. Miles explores this at length and discusses the light as truth metaphor in early discussions surrounding photography. There are several examples provided including Holmes's allusion "to 'the honest sunshine' to describe photography's truth value, the 'natural' creativity of the sun lent the medium its candour and integrity" (Miles, 2005, p. 331).

Another example is present in early promotional material for the daguerreotype that described how the "miniature is the work of a painter—the Daguerrean proof is the work of God... for it is the reflection of the shadow, the thought, the deeds of the sitter's soul united with God by the power of light" (quoted in Miles, 2005, p. 331). Interestingly, although this discourse pervaded early discussion surrounding photography, Miles demonstrates how it is still present today: providing evidence reinforcing the eminence of light within the discipline. It is continued that this photology creates "a circular movement which proceeds from and returns to an apparently natural and extra-discursive luminous origin, one

metaphorical system reinforces others and simultaneously delimits the possibility of an excessive or disruptive inscription of light from entering photographic discourse” (2005, p. 332).

While this may be the case, as cited above, within photographic theory, the regime of the truth of photography is no longer accepted by visual scholars and within discussions of visual cultures. This is not the case with the mirror. The ubiquity of the mirror and the triviality through which it is considered combined with this recurrent metaphor of truth has positioned the mirror to be understood in this way. It is this, therefore, that has permeated into the selfie discourse set above, and continued through discussions of the selfie and how the image of the body is created through its novel interface: as a truthful referent, at least; at first.

2.4.3 Returning to the mirror as an ontic site of interrogation: the mirror as apparatus

However, the mirror is not invisible. The mirror is a technology and therefore the same suspicions and scepticism theorised towards other image-making technologies, such as the camera, is required when accounting for how the mirror produces even specular images. The mirror is framed, and the frame of the mirror should be just as important to note as its reflective light-emitting surface. This is for a particular and important reason: a frame is a restriction and an indication of the mirror as *apparatus*. It is a boundary on an image that dictates specifically where an image can and cannot exist. The frame of the mirror is a means for controlling how light is reflected. This frame remains invisible in both Bing’s portrait and *Las Meninas*, and also the mirror selfie; but it is not apparent in the image of the novel selfie interface.

This framing and placement of the mirror is evidence that the mirror is a surface that produces a technical image: “an image created by an apparatus” (Flusser, 2000, p. 14). What this ultimately means for the mirror is that it is no longer a space for self-contemplation, but rather a surface upon which reflection is dictated through various social and cultural programs.¹⁵ The lack of attention paid to these

¹⁵ I encountered a poignant example of this the day before the submission of my treatise when disability campaigner, Katie Pennick, tweeted “Accessible Bathrooms” accompanied by various images of her hand reflected in bathroom mirrors (2021). Pennick is a wheelchair user and thus she had no accessibility to her reflections in these mirrors as they were installed—framed—by individuals who would ostensibly be considered able bodied. Ability and the installation of mirrors was not discussed in this treatise, but it is certainly an example of how mirrors are not neutral surfaces.

programs is ostensibly why Anna Mudde argues, in a paper titled “Self-images and the “perspicuous representations”: Reflection, philosophy, and the glass mirror” (2015), that “mirrors do not do what we have learned to think they do, and rather than being tools of private, direct, and clear self-access to a free and self-constituted self, they are better understood as complexly socially mediated, [with] their use being social all the way down” (Mudde, 2015, p. 540). There are, for lack of a better word, codes which define how the mirror is used and how the mirror looks back at an individual. Melchior-Bonnet called this the “triumph of mimesis” of the mirror:

One did not look at oneself in the mirror, the mirror that looked at you; the mirror dictated its own laws and served as a normative instrument for measuring conformity to the social code. Self-consciousness coincided first of all with the consciousness of one’s reflection, with one’s outward representation and visage—I am seen, therefore I am. Identity was created by appearances and by public approbation, leading toward the prominence of subject. (2001, p. 133)

And further:

The mirror’s legitimacy derived from the social other that it represented. It didn’t foster introversion, but rather emulation and exchange. Everyone admired the *honnête homme* because similarity fostered benevolence. An art of appearances, charm was a tangible resonance, a reversible echo rebounding from one to the other, setting into motion understanding between two beings. Everyone either liked or disliked what he saw in the mirror of others. The social concert would not be sustained without this reciprocal attitude, which fed the collective narcissism; civility—as the moralist Pierre Nicole complained—depended on superficial respect and consideration that “gave one occasion to represent oneself as loved and worthy, thus likeable and estimable”. (2001, pp. 146-147)

Mudde’s research offers some valuable inscriptions onto an understanding of the mirror as she argues that “the physical experiences of being reflected by glass mirrors have been inadequately theorised” (2015, p. 540). The central assertions of her findings are predicated on Donna Haraway’s larger epistemological project that examines how knowledge is obtained through notably patriarchal apparatus. What this means for Haraway is that any technology will always produce an epistemology dictated by the auspice of the apparatus that defines and allows for its existence (as an apparatus is not only a material, ontic tool, or technology, but the knowledges and power dynamics that define its use). In Haraway’s terms, the mirror is a technological eye and “the use of such eyes must be learned” (Mudde, 2015, p. 544). For example, looking through the lens of a microscope is a way of seeing, and “to make

sense of the visual cues one finds they must be learned” (Mudde, 2015, pp. 544-545). For Haraway, “ways of seeing the world are thus intimately connected with the ways knowers engage with or are engaged within it” (Mudde, 2015, p. 545). The mirror is yet another technological eye and thus implicit within using the mirror is a learned way of looking, underpinned by a cavalcade of value-ridden presuppositions (codes and programs) on how it should be interrogated—and what cues are needed to uncover when the surface is reflected upon. Ultimately, what this means is that any “claim to knowledge implies not an objective knower, but a situated knower/seer with a particular, identifiable vantage point” (Mudde, 2015, p. 545) when looking into the mirror.

There is extended empirical evidence to further justify the claims being made here (Bertamini, Spooner, & Hecht, 2003; Bertamini, Latto, & Spooner, 2003; Bertamini & Parks, 2005; Bertamini, Lawson, & Liu, 2007; Lawson et al., 2008; Bertamini & Wynne, 2010). Research published by the Visual Perception Labs of Liverpool University concludes that when examining a reflection in the mirror, there is a negotiation between what is expected to be seen (in the literature referred to as conceptual knowledge) and what is seen (in the literature referred to as perceptual knowledge). There is a distinction between the image in a mirror at both a conceptual and perceptual level within the vocabulary of this research. Simply, the research forwards that adding “to the sense of mystery associated with mirrors is the fact that people find simple questions about planar mirrors challenging” (Lawson et al., 2008, p. 274) and there was a “widespread misconceptions about the optics of mirror reflections in general” (Bertamini, Latto, & Spooner, 2003, p. 599). Within a paper titled *Naïve Optics: Predicting and Perceiving Reflections in Mirrors* (2003), various experiments are conducted tracking how individuals responded to mirror images and impressions of these images, showing that:

Participants therefore had to rely on some mental imagery or memory ... However, it is also possible that knowledge is acquired about reflections but only at a perceptual level. Participants may have no problem distinguishing between correct and incorrect mirror reflections when the reflections are visible. If so, the error found in some tasks would relate more to incorrect reasoning about mirrors than to total lack of knowledge. (Bertamini, Spooner, & Hecht, 2003, p. 985)

Ultimately, the “pattern of results suggests a dissociation of conceptual and perceptual knowledge” of what is seen in a mirror (Bertamini, Spooner, & Hecht, p. 1001).

This research further problematises claims made in selfie research regarding the role of the mirror in the novel interface of selfie-taking. What is important to take away (and what allows this empirical work to be connected to apparatus) is that this dissociation is defined as being largely *cultural* (see Nisbett & Miyamoto, 2005) and this offers empirical support to the cultural difference of perception. The term cultural has a twofold intent here: it shows that perception is not a universal, and that this perception develops over time. The research demonstrates the cultural ability to learn the proper ways of use of a mirror indicating that the difficulties in conceptual and perceptual knowledges of what is present in mirrors is “absent in primary school children and is likely to develop during later school years” (Bertamini & Wynne, 2010).

Of crucial importance is that this same difficulty with the specular mirror can be observed in observed responses to the novel selfie interface (Bruno & Bertamini, 2013, pp. 4-5). Again, like the literature on the novel interface presented above, the term interface is not explicitly used in this research but there are definite allusions to the concept. It is noted that with “the advent of smartphones equipped with quality cameras [(the FFC)] and preview screens, a large number of individuals have all been taking pictures of themselves” (Bruno et al., 2014, p. 45), and elsewhere, “most selfies are taken... while monitoring the image in the preview screen of a smartphone (which presents a mirror image)” (Bruno *et al.*, 2017, p. 281). Ultimately, within this literature, there is evidence that the response to the digital mirror of the selfie follows the same cultural determinants of perception that earlier work on glass and metal mirrors evidenced.

What can ultimately be drawn from the discussions above is the following: the mirror has developed an air of invisibility through its extensive distribution coupled with its relationship to light, and the positioning of light as truth. Yet, although this is the case, there is both theoretical and empirical evidence that counters such assertions. The mirror is not a revealing nor telling surface, but an apparatus through which socially coded and explicitly learned programs and statements are enacted. The mirror is, then, “an omnipresent, quintessentially value-laden (non-innocent) material apparatus of the West” (Mudde, 2015, p. 547).

This apparatus does not “belong to the closed space of intimacy, it also occupies the street, the glass walls of apartment buildings, the general space of the city” (Melchior-Bonnet, 2001, p. 98). Melchior-Bonnet’s accounts for how the mirror moved from luxury to necessity and had a material impact on how buildings were built and decorated (Melchior-Bonnet, 2001, p. 85, see also Heyne, 1996). It is a technology of the home as much as a stovetop is, as much as a Wi-Fi router is, and therefore an object through which lines of the apparatus can be seen. This is further evidence that the image in the mirror is a technical one. It is not a true, specular reflection of unadulterated light—it is an object that responds to the individual before it: and at times socially practised by an individual who is subject to it.

In short, the mirror is not reflective, but reactive.

2.5 Chapter conclusion: Towards the mirror as apparatus

This chapter made initial steps in returning to the mirror as a site of interrogation. It began by positing that it was not the camera that led to the irruption of selfies, but rather the mirror attached to the mobile phone (a networked device).

This assertion led to a discussion of two ways in which the mirror is used in selfie-taking. Firstly, the mirror selfie (a device directed at the screen) was examined in relation to Bing’s *Self-Portrait with Leica* (1931) and Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* (1656), revealing that a mirror within an image complicates how such images are received. The mirror is shown to create space before it and behind its surface, allowing for meaning to be emptied as the view occupies a heterotopic space exterior and interior to the mirror. The significance of realising this space is that it necessitates the organisation of the body within it, and so the use of the mirror is always gestural.

Once this had been established, the chapter turned to the second mirror of selfie practice: the novel selfie interface and it was shown that this mirror is predicated on *a myth of invisibility*. The invisibility of the mirror is essential to how the selfie process is interpreted and intensified, with repeated evidence of this myth found in the reviewed literature on selfie research. Following this review, the chapter

presented research into how the myth of invisibility was perpetuated due to two factors. Firstly, the mirror was ubiquitous. Secondly, the mirror is a technology of light.

It was concluded that the reflection in the mirror was not a phenomenal image but a technical one and should therefore be interrogated as an image created via apparatus. The process and methodological considerations for an examination of apparatus are presented in Chapter 3 to follow.

3 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR INTERROGATING THE MIRROR AS APPARATUS AND AN EXEMPLIFICATION OF THE TROUBLING STRANGENESS OF THE NOVEL SELFIE INTERFACE

3.1 An outline of the theory of apparatus used within this thesis and its value in interrogating the novel selfie interface

This chapter returns to the mirror by conducting a critical analysis of the mirror as an apparatus. The term apparatus provides a valuable methodological function for assessing the mirror and the image it produces. Therefore, this chapter will outline how apparatus is theorised in this thesis; and apply this conceptualisation to a close examination of the novel selfie interface and some of its peculiarities.

Primarily, the work of Foucault offers one of the most extensive methodological foundations for attending to apparatus, and therefore this is where this section will begin. It will present some of the theoretical vocabulary presented by Foucault and the methodological considerations required when using these concepts. However, Foucault's initial conceptualisation is expanded through the research of Agamben and the notion of desubjectification exploring how an apparatus—such as the mirror—creates a subject who is once captured by its machinations, while simultaneously believing themselves to exist outside of them. Once this has been established, the methods of apparatus will be slightly extended through the work of Flusser as it is in this research where the relationship between apparatus and image are readily and thoroughly conceptualised. The desubjectification of the apparatus is intertwined with how, for Flusser, an apparatus creates an image “automatically” (2000, p. 29).

Only then can the novel interface of the selfie—an interface comprising a camera- and mirror-apparatus—be more effectively revisited to reconsider how the image of the body is created. However, a central problem is forwarded as a marked distinction is drawn between the specular mirror and the novel selfie interface. The specular mirror is a surface of polished metals or silvered glass that reflects light, however, the mirror of the novel selfie interface (which will hereforth be referred to as a digital mirror) is shown to be a mirror in practice and name alone. In being composed of the FFC and the high-resolution screen, an individual forming a relationship with this digital mirror encounters a series of perceptual breaks implicit to this interface. The term break here refers to a failing, interstice, or fracture

in the expected outcome of a reflection: the break in eye contact, a troubling strangeness, and various digital functionalities, for example.

However, although these breaks are readily present, they are not apparent. They are invisible. The chapter presents a hypothesis of why this is the case. It concludes by suggesting that gesture—the disposition of the subject—has an organising role in how these perceptual breaks are reincorporated within the apparatus, maintaining any semblance of desubjectification.

3.2 The methodological function of the term apparatus

Throughout his writing, Foucault uses the term apparatus as a method to describe a variety of different structures, mechanisms, and arrangements. Clare O'Farrell comments that Foucault used the term “to indicate the various institutional, physical and administrative mechanisms and knowledge structures, which enhance and maintain the exercise of power within the social body” (2005, p. 129). To describe something as an apparatus means to examine how an ensemble of heterogeneous elements all operate together in the expression of a thing. Foucault describes various administrative-, repressive-, state-, judicial apparatus throughout his writing, yet a flat description of an apparatus is not explicitly apparent in his (translated) work. His most cogent description of an apparatus is found in a published conversation, “The confessions of the flesh” (1972a), where he is asked to define the term and its methodological function. Foucault answers as follows:

What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements. Thus, a particular discourse can figure at one time as the programme of an institution, and at another it can function as a means of justifying or masking a practice which itself remains silent, or as a secondary re-interpretation of this practice, opening out for it a new field of rationality. In short, between these elements, whether discursive or non-discursive, there is a sort of interplay of shifts of position and modifications of function which can also vary very widely. Thirdly, I understand by the term ‘apparatus’ a sort of—shall we say—formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need. The apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function. This may have been, for example, the assimilation of a floating population found to be burdensome for an essentially

mercantilist economy: there was a strategic imperative acting here as the matrix for an apparatus which gradually undertook the control or subjection of madness, mental illness and neurosis. (1972a, pp. 194-195)

It is readily apparent that to conduct research in terms of the apparatus is to discuss how various discourse, knowledges and dominant strategic functions all interweave themselves through a technology, institution, individual and so on. However, before turning to specific examples of this, and its value in conceptualising the mirror and the novel selfie interface, it is worth paying specific attention to the methodological considerations required for contending with an apparatus comprehensively, as presented in Foucault's answer. Accordingly, there are three central considerations to keep in mind when examining an apparatus: discourse, knowledge, and power.

3.2.1 Consideration 1: Apparatus, statement, and discourse

First, considering an apparatus requires an examination of what is "said as much as the unsaid" (1972a, p. 194). An apparatus in his work has been described as an "organization of statements" (Buchanan, 2010), and through this organisation is a process of allowing things to be said and not said, Foucault offers an extended and detailed explication on the properties and functions of statements within *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972b, pp. 55-63). However, the word "statement" (*énoncé*) and the verb "said" could lead to misunderstandings as the meaning of statement here is not a sentence, phrase, word, nor any "unit of a linguistic type" (1972b, p. 119). Rather, a statement is "an enunciative function that involve[s] various units" (Foucault, 1972b, p. 119). Foucault writes that it is this "enunciative function" that "enables such groups of signs to exist and enables these rules or forms to become manifest" (1972b, p. 110). A statement then is not what is said, but what allows for a certain way of talking to be made possible. For example, when (not) talking about the mirror in terms of the myth of invisibility which was alluded to above, this myth of invisibility is not a statement. Rather it is in the functioning of how things are said and unsaid that allows the mirror to be spoken of in such a manner that results in this invisibility.

Statements in their enunciative function allows for an apparatus (such as the mirror) to be spoken of in a particular way as a statement is the most elementary object of *discourse*: a central concept that was

developed within Foucault's work. Discourse is not so much what is being said, but perhaps better understood as to how something is allowed to be spoken, and this is evidenced in how Foucault defines discourse in *The History of Sexuality* (1978) as "tactical elements of blocks operating in the field of force relations" (1978, pp. 101-102). Methodologically, concerning the selfie research above, the central thesis presented within the research involves how discourses encompassing the camera and the image it produces, and the discourses encompassing the mirror and the image it produces, results in a particular understanding of the novel selfie interface. Various statements (*énoncé*) function together to create a discourse of the selfie. An apparatus, then, is the set of procedures that ultimately control, select, organise, and redistribute these discourses (Foucault, 1970a, pp. 51-52).

3.2.2 Consideration 2: Apparatus and knowledge(s)

Second, considering an apparatus requires examining "the nature of the connection between these heterogeneous elements" (Foucault, 1972a, pp. 194-195). It is important to consider how these various elements are connected within a single apparatus as the elements of an apparatus are diverse in their quality and substance. This relationship is predominantly developed in terms of knowledge.¹⁴ The conception of knowledge, in relation to the apparatus, is how knowledge is organised and represented through the discursive practice allowed by an apparatus and how other equally valid statements "have to be discredited and denied" (Mills, 2003, p. 67) as an apparatus allows for what is both said and unsaid, for something to be established as a fact or a truth. When the concept of knowledge is discussed in terms of the apparatus, it is not knowledge in terms of what is known, but knowledge in terms of *how* something has come to be known; the connections that have formed between the elements that have allowed it to be understood in a particular fashion.

¹⁴ Foucault uses the terms *savoir* and *connaissance* throughout his writing, both of which are translated as "knowledge" in English as English does not have equivalents to mark the nuanced distinction denoted in these two terms. A clumsy explanation could be to say that *connaissance* refers to a certain body of knowledge (knowledge of the camera, for example), while *savoir* is a term that can be used to refer to knowledge more generally. Effectually, as Dunkerly-Bean and Bean (2016, p. 450) write, "*savoir* is the sum of all *connaissances*". Within this thesis, the word "knowledge" is used principally in the sense of *connaissance*; however, a translation is made in brackets if a distinction is required or quoted. See Burchell's translation notes (2013, p. xv) in Foucault's *Lectures on the Will to Know* (2011) and Defert's essay (2013, pp. 264-265) in the same volume for further commentary on this distinction.

An apparatus situates knowledge and is simultaneously situated through knowledges. Within selfie research, for example, the topic of the selfie was approached with existing knowledges, and therefore an understanding of the selfie was arranged in a particular order. Knowledge of the camera and (perhaps lack of) knowledges of the mirror provided these objects with a visibility that, in turn, resulted in the development of a specific discourse (to reiterate, discourse also meaning practice). Also, take the case of the Paris Hilton tweet examined in Section 1.2: this incessant pursuit for an irreproachable history of the selfie is a real time demonstration of how various knowledges all interwove themselves around the selfie (knowledges of self-portraiture, photography, invention, origins etc.). It becomes methodologically imperative to uncover the various knowledges that lead to the formation of an apparatus. Within Foucault's writing, his initial method for achieving this was through a process he referred to as an "archaeology". Perhaps his most direct explanation of this method can be seen in an interview with Raymond Bellour where Foucault states that the archaeological method prescribed in his work sets to reveal "the condition of possibility of knowledge [*connaissance*], of institutions, of practices" (Foucault, 1998, p. 262); in an attempt to answer the question of what it is that has allowed individuals, institutions, populations, sects, groups and so on to speak of ideas and or concepts in certain ways, with certain languages, at certain moments. His archaeology is less about resurrecting the past and more about an examination of a history that has allowed for the possibility of various statements to exist within it. As Sara Mills writes, his archaeological analysis "is not interpretative; that is, it does not offer explanations of what happened in the past—it simply describes what happens and the discursive conditions under which it was possible for that to happen" (Mills, 2003, p. 24).

3.2.3 Consideration 3: Apparatus and power

Thirdly, considering an apparatus requires examining its dominant strategic function. In short, how an apparatus both produces and maintains *power*. In *The History of Sexuality* (1978), Foucault outlines the discursive parameters of his theory of power. His discussion of power begins with the remark that "the word *power* is apt to lead to a number of misunderstandings" (1978, pp. 92-96) as generally power is understood as the possession of a controlling influence with a definite agency. However, he is quite clear in his denouement of common understandings of the term, and that by power he does not mean

“either, a mode of subjugation which in contrast to violence, has the form of rule... [or] a general system of domination exerted by one group over another” (1978, p. 92), but rather power, for Foucault, must be understood, in the first instance, “as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization” (1978, p. 92). In other words, within a social body, for instance, power is the creative or destructive relationships between all heterogeneous elements of an apparatus.

Foucault speaks further about the ubiquitous nature of his conception of power, and he maintains that power “is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (1978, p. 62). He states:

Power, insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these motilities, the concatenation that rests on each of them and seeks in turn to arrest their movement. One needs to be nominalistic, no doubt; power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. (1978, p. 62)

Foucault defines power to be permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing; a mechanism that defines subjectivity through a variety of mechanisms.

Of course, where there is power there is always resistance to power. Resistance is intrinsic to every power relationship. He writes that “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (1978, p. 95).

Resistances are illustrated as a series of “points” (1978, pp. 95-96) in every power relation. However, these points of resistance are not uniform nor consistent, but rather, for all intents and purposes, eclectic and random. In other words, resistances in power do not always emerge as revolutionary modulation, but rather as a “plurality of [points], each of them a special case: resistances... are possible, necessary, improbable; others... are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concentrated, rampant or violent” (Foucault, 1978, p. 96).

Regardless of the complex notion as to how power is conceptualised, it is key to the apparatus as the apparatus is always strategic. Foucault defines his use of strategic as follows:

[T]he apparatus is essentially of a *strategic* nature, which means assuming that it is a matter of a certain manipulation of relations of forces, either developing them in a particular direction, blocking them, stabilising them, utilising them, *etc.* The apparatus is thus always inscribed in a play of power, but it is also always linked to certain coordinates of knowledge which issue from it but, to an equal degree, condition it. This is what the apparatus consists in: strategies of relations of forces supporting, and supported by, types of knowledge. (1972a, p. 196)

Ultimately, the apparatus is an ensemble of heterogeneous elements, enunciated through discourse, related through knowledge, and exercised through power; and within the system of relations established through these mechanisms is the formation of an individual becoming a subject.

3.3 How the machinations of the apparatus result in an individual becoming subject

The apparatus as a functional method of analysis, therefore, is an examination of how what is both said and unsaid develop connections between various heterogeneous elements to perform a dominant strategic function, and are each arranged through a particular object, system, technology, or structure. Therefore, through this method of analysis, an example such as the mirror should never be examined exclusively through its material nor ontic parameters, but how it operates as a relationship between discourse, knowledge, and power. However, it is not simply the arranging of this ternary that is invaluable to this thesis, but rather how an individual becomes a subject through an apparatus as there is no subject outside of the apparatus. Foucault is adamant that the subject is created through the apparatus; however, it is unclear where the frontiers of the apparatus lie (this is expanded upon in detail in terms of DeLanda's work on the assemblage and the individual presented in Chapter 6, Section 6.2). Foucault would write that while power had predominated his thinking, "it is not power, but the subject, that is the general theme of [his] research" (1982, p. 327).

Practically, this definition of subject is followed in this thesis: the subject is the individual defined by an apparatus.

As subject, the ability to speak is determined through various forces; however, while Foucault talks of what is said and unsaid, in an essay on the apparatus titled "What is a *dispositif*", Deleuze expands this by positing that the "first two dimensions of a social apparatus [*dispositif*]... are curves of visibility *and*

curves of enunciation” (Deleuze, 1992, pp. 159-160). In other words, an apparatus does not just dictate what is said, but also dictates what is seen; or at the very least allows for the possibility of being seen. For this reason, as Heinrich Wölfflin, wrote “vision itself has its history” (1950, p. 43) and the mirror can be understood as an apparatus not exclusively in terms of the myth of invisibility as what is said and spoken of it, but also how it allows itself to be looked upon.

As continued: “Each apparatus has its way of structuring light, the way in which it falls, blurs and disperses, distributing the visible and the invisible, giving birth to objects which are dependent on it for their existence, and causing them to disappear” (1992, p. 160). While the use of the term light here as a metonymy for perception is perhaps not the most effective, in terms of the mirror-apparatus is can be taken more literally in terms of specular reflection. A mirror needs to restrict and structure the light which is reflected off it otherwise it is of no use. For example, a mirror in a garden on a bright summer day that reflects the sun directly cannot be used by an individual to see their reflection: to look into it would be impossible as the full intensity of the sun would destroy the human eye. The bathroom mirror does not set the retinas on fire in the morning; it has become technologically restrained to reflect in an acceptable and expected manner. A mirror requires correct positioning before an individual can position themselves before it correctly.

What is notable in Deleuze’s essay on the apparatus is how all social apparatus result in a creation of the subject that identifies itself. The lines of what can and cannot be said, and the lines of what can and cannot be seen are referred to as “lines of subjectification... [which] is a process, a production of subjectivity in a social apparatus [*dispositif*]: it has to be made, inasmuch as the apparatus allows it to come into being or makes it possible” (1992, p. 161). However, this process of subjectification—meaning the creation of a subject—is not in itself a complete and final process but an ongoing process of individuation¹⁵ that results in a desubjectification of the subject. For the moment, the process of desubjectification will be explored. Individuation will be returned to in explicit detail in Section 6.2.

¹⁵ The process of individuation in the work of Deleuze and Guattari is adopted from *L’individuation psychique et collective* (2007) by Gilbert Simondon. Within the research, Simondon problematises existing philosophies of ontology and argues instead in favour of ontogenesis; or there is not final individual, but rather a subject experience a process of individuation that is

3.4 Agamben and desubjectification of the subject via apparatus

A valuable resource for understanding this vocabulary and the desubjectified position of the subject within an apparatus is Agamben's essay "What is an apparatus?" (2009). It is worth discussing this as Agamben presents the notion of desubjectification. He forwards that, in being desubjectified, the subject within the apparatus is "devoid of any foundation in being" (2009, p. 11), meaning that the subject within the apparatus is not *an individual* in and of themselves but only *a subject* in and of themselves, and it is through this that the apparatus continues producing more subjects and "is the reason apparatus must always imply a process of subjectification. That is to say, they must produce their subject" (2009, p. 11).

An individual encounters the apparatus and experiences a process of subjectification: they become subject to the apparatus. Agamben explicitly uses the verb "capture" (2009, p. 13) to describe this process (which will be echoed in Flusser's treatment) and contends that "anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors [*sic*], opinions or discourses of living beings" is an apparatus (2009, p. 14). What is valuable to take from Agamben's work is that within his examples of apparatus he is not only concerned with the larger societal apparatus such as the administrative, judicial, repressive, or state apparatus Foucault wrote of but concerned with "the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cellular telephones and—why not—language itself" (2009, p. 14). The capture of the subject occurs at various levels. It is not only being made subject that is of concern within this capturing, but how this capture results in a process of desubjectification in which "—through a series of practices, discourses, and bodies of knowledge—docile, yet free, bodies that assume their identity and their 'freedom' as subjects" (2009, pp. 19-20). Thus, the process of desubjectification is not one of escaping the position of subject and navigating beyond the constriction of the apparatus. Rather,

ongoing. A complete commentary of this is well beyond the scope of this thesis. However, effective commentaries are available in Combes (2012) and, partially, Grosz (2017). A useful conceptualisation of individuation is discussed in Hui (2016; 2019) where the concept of individuation is explored in relation to digital technologies.

desubjectification is a process in which the subject believes themselves to be free of the apparatus while still fettered and rapt between the various discourse, power, and knowledge functions of it.

Agamben uses the example of the cellular telephone to evidence this:

[T]he gestures and behaviors [*sic*] of individuals have been reshaped from top to toe by the cellular telephone (which the Italians dub the *telefonino*) I have developed an implacable hatred for this apparatus, which has made the relationship between people all the more abstract. Although I found myself more than once wondering how to destroy or deactivate those *telefonini* as well as how to eliminate or at least to punish and imprison those who do not stop using them, I do not believe that this is the right solution to the problem. (2009, pp. 15-16)

The apparatus here is the mobile phone, and Agamben states that this apparatus has transformed the individual into the subject of this device. The desire to destroy the apparatus is further elaborated later when it is written:

He who lets himself be captured by the “cellular telephone” apparatus—whatever the intensity of the desire that has acquire driven him—cannot acquire a new subjectivity, but only a number through which he can, eventually, be controlled. The spectator who spends his evenings in front of the television set only gets, in exchange for his frustrated desubjectification, the mask of the couch potato, or his inclusion in the calculation of viewership ratings. (2009, p. 21)

Through this framing of the apparatus, then, in being subject to the phone apparatus the individual becomes desubjectified and made docile within its machinations. However, consider this in contrast to the selfie research presented in Section 2.3.1. There is an ostensible agreement that an individual becomes subject to the camera-apparatus; however, the placement of the mirror within this interface is what allows for resistance to this (de)subjectification. The embodied subject Warfield speaks of is an individual who has used the novel selfie interface to navigate themselves outside of the apparatus through a re-negotiated authenticity. Or to use Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz’s term, a representation of an individual that is more “accurate” (2015, p. 89), and not only subject to the camera-apparatus.

Agamben’s theory allows the positioning of a counterpoint to such an argument as there is no correct use of the apparatus as the process of subjectification (or, in this case, desubjectification) corresponds to each apparatus. It is impossible for the subject to use an apparatus “in the right way” (2009, p. 21). He

contends that those who promote arguments surrounding the liberating or democratising potential of such technologies are, “for their part, the product of the media apparatus in which they are captured” (2009, p. 21). However, the dynamic happening here is far more complex as the role of the image, and its position as product of the apparatus, becomes tantamount to understanding if the subject is doomed to the procedures of the mobile-phone apparatus; or liberated by the novel interface of the selfie.

Flusser’s work is incredibly valuable in this regard.

3.5 Flusser’s technical image and its relation to the subject

There are undoubtedly echoes, parallels and similarities in how the apparatus is defined in the research of both Flusser and Foucault, although no direct evidence could be found of whether the two figures read each other. Flusser’s adoption of the term apparatus does appear to follow a lineage of thought stemming back to the early 20th century. Noted Flusser scholar Rainer Guldin writes in “Golem, Roboter und andere Gebilde. Zu Vilém Flussers Apparatbegriff” (“Golems, robots and other structures: On Vilém Flusser’s concept of the apparatus”), (2009) that the “genealogischen Wurzeln dieses Begriffs reichen... weiter zurück: in das Prag der 20er und 30er Jahre” ([The genealogical roots of this term go back ... further: to the Prague of the 20s and 30s], 2009, p. 1) and gives no indication whether Flusser’s conceptualisation is influenced by Foucault. However, the research presents an extended comparison to Flusser’s apparatus and Agamben’s (explicitly Foucauldian definition of) apparatus stating that “hier geht es ... nicht um eine Übereinstimmung, sondern um einige Kontaktpunkte” ([“it is not about a match ... but about a few points of contact”], 2009, p. 8).

Of these points of contact, the apparatus in Flusser’s work, like Agamben, is desubjectifying in its creation of the subject as control becomes relinquished to the increasing automation (Flusser, 2011, pp. 72-73). For Flusser, an apparatus creates an image “automatically” (2000, p. 29) and this occurs at two levels: first through its mechanical, technical, and electronic functioning as a gadget or tool; second, through the programs of the subject who is instructed to use it. Speaking in terms of photography, Flusser makes use of the metaphor of the black box (2000, p. 16) to elucidate how this automation takes

place. In that the interior of the black box is unknown to the user, the images produced occur automatically. In his words:

The significance appears to flow into the complex on the one side (input) in order to flow out on the other side (output), during which the process—what is going on within the complex—remains concealed: a ‘black box’ in fact. The encoding of technical images, however, is what is going on in the interior of this black box and consequently any criticism of technical images must be aimed at an elucidation of its inner workings. As long as there is no way of engaging in such criticism of technical images, we shall remain illiterate. (2000, p. 16)

However, this itself can lead to some misunderstanding, and Flusser’s work is at times contradictory. It is easily assumed that the black box posited in this metaphor is the camera itself; however, the black box is not only the camera: the black box is the camera-apparatus. To express this another way: the camera is not the black box, rather the camera-object, photography, its codes, programs, gestures, and movements are all enshrined and sublimated within this metaphor.

Flusser’s work is ultimately quite fatalistic when it comes to the role of the subject within the apparatus. He writes that “the apparatus functions as a function of the photographer’s intention, this intention itself functions as a function of the camera’s program” (2000, p. 35), and since the photographer is subject to the camera-apparatus, the knowledge base surrounding this object, the discourse and dominant power structures surrounding the device, all result in the desubjectification noted above. As he asserts, during “the act of photography the camera does the will of the photographer, but the photographer has to will what the camera can do” (2000, p. 35).

This then is a complete definition of a technical image: not simply one produced by apparatus, but one produced by the desubjectified subject of the apparatus.

The process of desubjectification is, therefore, an unconscious or possibly unintentional acceptance of an invisibility and an ignorance of programs and codes. It is an assertion of truth to an image defined in terms of an apparatus and not the specifics of the image itself. As a result, the subject is simultaneously defined and captured through this definition. Capture is a word used by Agamben and invoked in Flusser’s work through his metaphor of the hunt (Flusser, 2000, pp. 22-39). The apparatus hunts the

individual and the possibility of the image afforded by them through this capturing. The mirror within the selfie interface is an aid in this hunt as it provides the invisibility that allows the subject to develop an ecumenical relationship with the camera: an apparatus that baits an apparatus. The irruption of selfies made possible through this novel interface is predicated not on the ease of use of the device but the impression of freedom that is presented by its very functioning.

However, what is perhaps most troubling here is that the freedoms presented are subject to an array of noticeable and obvious breaks. The word “break” here means that although the novel interface is recognised as an analogue mirror, there are gaps and interstices between the functioning of a traditional specular surface and the digital machinations of the camera and screen combination. While the FFC and large screen are recognised as a mirror throughout selfie literature, and while the response to this interface is identical to that of a mirror: it is astounding just how different from a glass mirror this surface is because of these breaks. This is by and large due to how the mirror of the novel selfie interface goes through a process of remediation (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). The camera and screen are recognised as a single surface that produces (remediates) a reflection and not a recorded video. As Bolter and Grusin write, “each medium [(in this case the novel selfie interface)] promises to reform its predecessors by offering a more immediate or authentic experience [(than the previous analogue mirror)], the promise of reform inevitably leads us to become aware of the new medium as a medium” (1999, p. 19). This is by and large due to the immediacy of the device and how the function of the device has become transparent (Bolter & Grusin 1999, p. 21-24).

3.6 The disparity and troubling strangeness of the novel selfie interface

There are some functional differences between specular glass- and metal mirrors and the digital mirror of the novel selfie interface. These present an array of breaks that differentiate this mirror from the specular surfaces that precede it, upon which discourse and knowledge of the mirror are founded. In other words, an individual carries with them a position as subject of the mirror when they approach the digital mirror. Breaks in expectations are a result of this.

The first break is found in the eye line. When an individual faces a specular mirror, there is eye contact between the individual standing before the mirror and their reflection. However, this is not possible in a digital mirror as the FFC and screen result in a parallax created by the distance between the FFC and the screen of the mobile device. When taking a selfie, with the arm raised and the mobile device turned inwards, an individual does not look directly into themselves, but “rather toward the screen of a smartphone, slightly offset from the camera lens” (Bellinger, 2015, p. 1808). Instead of making direct eye contact with themselves in the mirror, the selfie-taker is looking at a version of themselves looking at their phone screen: they look at themselves looking at themselves. Although such a break in eye line is slight, it still has a profound impact on the selfie. This results in the first moment of alterity between the digital mirror and the individual looking into it. Interestingly, when looking at selfies of other people, this causes a fissure in what is colloquially referred to as the Mona Lisa effect. The Mona Lisa effect occurs when a subject looks directly into the lens of a camera or directly at a painter when their image is being captured. This results in the subject of the photograph or painting staring directly at the viewer. The eyes, as it were, follow the user around the room, “continuing to do so despite all attempts to move or rotate the photo or oneself” (Horstmann & Loth, 2019, p. 1; Hecht et al., 2014). However, in the case of the images produced by this novel interface, the parallax between the camera and the screen makes such an effect impossible. This parallax can be avoided by looking directly into the camera of the phone or if the camera is held at a great enough distance away from a selfie taker: however, the human arm does not seem to allow for such reach. (This can be mitigated with the use of a monopod colloquially referred to as a selfie stick that extends the reach of the human arm. The selfie stick is often used by tourists as the extended reach allows for a greater background in the image).

A second break of the digital mirror illustrates the troubling strangeness of this mirror. This was noted in the paper “‘Selfies’ reveal systematic deviations from known principles of photographic composition” (Bruno et al., 2014, mentioned in Section 2.4.3) where it is observed that a moment of chirality occurs as a captured image is reversed. While the selfie taker may not recognise this moment of chirality, they are possibly cognitive of it. By saving the image as if it were taken by another photographer, the device re-informs the already existing alterity between an individual and their reflection. Nanna Verhoeff

discusses this alterity in the taking of a selfie whilst writing on urban screens in a chapter titled “Screens in the city” (2016). She discusses the complicated deixis encountered when trying to discuss the selfie: it becomes a device that allows for individuals to look at themselves being looked at by themselves—being photographed by other individuals who are also themselves (reminiscent of the complex volume produced by Bing’s photograph, Section 2.2.1). In many ways, instead of the duplicity of the specular mirror, this novel interface creates a *triplicity* which can be evidenced in Verhoeff’s deictic markers (2016, pp. 133-134) of the “I” who is taking the selfie, the “you” who appears on the screen and a third “them” or “she” or “he” who is being gazed at by the “you” on the screen.

The last difference between the digital mirror and the analogue mirror—which is more steeped in the technology of the camera—is in how a digital camera can capture, record, and display an image. A glass mirror functions as an object that reflects light, but in the selfie moment, light is not directed towards a polished surface but a digital camera, and, as with most photography, the light recorded by this digital camera “is mechanically neutralised and stabilised” (Miles, 2005, p. 335). Unlike a *miroir ardent* (the burning mirror, a concept used by Luce Irigaray and discussed in Chapter 7) which allows for lens flares, overexposure, sunspots and other natural expressions of light, the digital camera presents light that is corralled and managed in a particular way. It further modifies the image—and this is another way that the technology of the device informs the final image—through its method of pixelation, compression and so on. In short, the digital camera is in no capacity reflecting light: rather, it is responding to light and producing an image based upon its best—automatic, but transparent and technologically informed— notions of what it should look like.¹⁶ This is before other aspects of the FFC occur: for example, many front-facing cameras on recent mobile device models have a variety of beauty modes that affect white balance, highlight and sharpen eyes, and smooth skin through a variety of image manipulation techniques *before* the image is captured.

¹⁶ These notions are hegemonic. I follow Stuart Hall’s conceptualisation of the term in where hegemony should be considered as a “very particular, historically specific, and temporary ‘moment’ in the life of a society” (1986, p. 309). The visibility of these moments, what things—should look like—are socially and politically informed via technologies and modes of production of the time. In terms of computer vision (the way devices and systems harvest significant information from digital videos and photos), race was a particular problem insofar as computer vision, historically, fails to see “Blackness” (Benjamin, 2019, p. 99) while also making Blackness extra-visible within security technologies. See Benjamin 2019 for an extended, detailed examination of this.

To summarise these three points: the novel interface creates breaks in three ways. First, the impossibility of eye line makes it seem as if you are looking at someone else. Second, the captured image is flipped as if another individual had taken the photo. Lastly, the processes of digital image technology manipulates the image.

Revealed in these breaks is the true treachery of the technical image. The danger of the technical image is not that it is created via apparatus, informed by the codes of the apparatus, defined by the social and cultural programs of the apparatus. The treachery of the technical image is the inability to recognise the frontiers of the operation of these images and mistake the technical image for a traditional image. The desubjectification that occurs is an acceptance that the reflection seen in the novel selfie interface is a reflection at all despite all the breaks in perception.

Ultimately this technical image is not technical because it is created by apparatus: it is technical as the invisibility of the apparatus is reinforced through how the subject interfaces with it.

3.7 Chapter conclusion: The role of the novel selfie interface in the production of an image of the body via apparatus

Ultimately, what this chapter illustrates is how the mirror becomes apparatus within the novel selfie interface. It demonstrated that while this mirror is central to the selfie, this mirror in its machinations (break in eye line et al.) causes a schism or break.

It is hypothesised that when faced with such breaks the body, is impelled to compensate for the failed expectations by moving; or, in other words, impelled into a specific gesture. In the case of the selfie, the interfacing with the camera and the digital mirror is created through a change in the gesture of the body that allows the body to appear as subject to both the mirror and camera through how the body gestures. However, the breaks in perception encountered are by no means shocking or revealing; instead, it shall be demonstrated that the movements of the body; provided by the gesture of the body; created through the apparatus, reconcile these breaks. It is this perceptual reconciliation that makes the apparatus automatic or transparent: invisible.

While there is debate between the role of the traditional and technical image in the creation of the body through the relationship developed by the novel selfie interface, there is a third category of image that is not considered: the gestural one. This is the gesture-image: not an image created by apparatus, but how the body accepts the invisibility of the apparatus at the level of perception resulting in a category of image between the body and apparatus. Not by chance, gesture becomes prominent in the writing of both Agamben and Flusser. However, in both cases, the role gesture plays in both the creation and conservation of the apparatus is not realised completely. Agamben argues how an apparatus can transform a gesture, and Flusser discusses gesture as apparatus in practice; however, these theories require an extension, and the role of gesture in the context of apparatus theory requires resituating. Furthermore, in the literature and research of the novel selfie interface discussed above, there is considerable mention of how *the body moves* in response to the novel selfie interface. Gesture ultimately has a pivotal role in the creation of the image through this apparatus and interfacing. Not only in how the body responds to the apparatus and interface but also in how the *perceptual possibilities of the body allow the production of a particular category of image*.

Gesture is what occurs when the body of an individual encounters the apparatus and readily and near seamlessly accepts the invisibilities therein. This will be examined in the next chapter: the role of gesture in organising the perceptual break when encountering the apparatus.

4 THE ROLE OF GESTURE IN ORGANISING THE PERCEPTUAL BREAK WHEN ENCOUNTERING THE APPARATUS

4.1 Limitations in symbolic movement definitions of gesture

The preceding chapters established the mirror as an apparatus; which revealed that the mirror creates a technical image: an image created through apparatus (Flusser, 2000, p. 14; Flusser, 2011, p. 3). This problematises arguments made within the existing literature on the selfie which examines how the novel interface of the selfie creates an image of the body which is more authentic or accurate (Section 2.3.1). Chapter 3 then turned to apparatus theory to illustrate that the mirror and the camera are both programmed, but also identified a selection of perceptual breaks between the individual and their device (break in eye line, flipped image etc).

This chapter argues that these perceptual breaks are overcome through gesture and not through the creation of the image. Therefore, to understand how the interfacing with the novel apparatus of the selfie creates an image of the body, it is required that the concept of gesture is discussed. However, within this chapter gesture is exemplified *not* as a symbolic movement of the body and instead gesture is posited as a method of perceptual organisation between the individual and their relationship to an apparatus (discussed in Chapter 1). The chapter ultimately demonstrates that gesture is not solely dictated in terms of the apparatus, nor is it a complete individual mode of bodily expression. Gesture is somewhere in the middle.

However, this conceptualisation requires expansion. While gesture is dictated and defined in terms of the apparatus, the body is not a neutral, non-perceiving element of the apparatus: it is not an unfeeling cog in a machine. Therefore, to fully conceptualise what is meant by the presented definition—a movement of the body that occurs from within an apparatus—the concept of “body” requires careful articulation. This work is presented in this chapter using phenomenology as a method of analysis as this method offers a means for contending with experience. Specifically, the experience of phenomena, with phenomena here referring to the object of the experiences of an individual. It is a difficult and, oftentimes, incredulous method of analysis that can fall into various abstractions and difficult means of

expression. However, it offers considerable value in how an individual experiences an interface and is useful to understand the perceptual machinations of the individual more effectively within an apparatus; and with the inevitable experiences they engage. In summation, while theories on the apparatus can dictate how knowledge, power, and discourse express themselves through the codes and programs of the novel selfie interface, phenomenology provides a method for contending with the experiencing of said apparatus in examining how perception is organised within these terms.

There is veritable and sophisticated tension between readings of apparatus and readings of phenomenology. Phenomenology is situated around the experience of the individual and how this experience provides an understanding of their being-in-the-world. However, theorists of the apparatus would counter; arguing that the very ability to experience is made possible by the programs of the apparatus itself. More generally, in terms of the apparatus, there is no universal experience of the individual, only the techniques available to the subject of the apparatus. Regardless, when expanding theories of apparatus into the realm of gesture, phenomenology becomes important as gesture will always be perceptual through the definition of “body” provided (in Section 4.5.2). A complex synthesis is therefore required of how an apparatus defines a subject, and how the individual experiences this relationship. This chapter begins this synthesis.

Before such a synthesis can be provided, and before a more developed language is presented to navigate these difficulties, it is a prerequisite to demonstrate the methodological value of phenomenology in terms of gesture and then in terms of the gestural image of the selfie. This chapter then provides this demonstration, also. It does so to present an answer to the question of how gesture can be conceptualised through phenomenology. Put most simply, because gesture is a disposition of the body, and because the body requires an expanded conceptualisation following phenomenology; how can this disposition be understood at the level of experience?

Practically, this chapter is presented in several subsections.

First, the chapter opens with a presentation of existing literature on gesture and the selfie. This section allows for the investigation of a gap in theories surrounding the selfie, gesture, and the body that has

resulted from underdeveloped theorising around the body. While a host of theories around the selfie contend with the image of the body created (as seen in the discussion Section 1.3 and Section 2.3.1) and various theories of gesture within selfie research look at the movement itself, there is a gap in conceptualising the body that precedes interfacing with the apparatus. Phenomenology allows for an accounting of the perceptual capacities of this body before any movement is enacted or image is captured. Current selfie research—as shall be demonstrated in the review of existing literature (Section 4.2)—does not examine this. This is due in large part to difficulties when conceptualising gesture beyond a symbolic movement.

Second, the chapter traces these difficulties through discussions on semiology and linguistics (and attempts to transcribe gesture through technical notion). It looks at how gestures can lead to misunderstandings when reduced to a symbolic movement. This problem is exemplified in a reading of a vignette, “A neighbourly misunderstanding” (1983), from *Campion and Lee’s Passionless Moments*. The section then examines research on how gesture is described in terms of apparatus. It looks at the alleged death of gestures foretold by Adorno (1951, p. 40) and Agamben (2000, p. 49), the grammatization of an individual’s movements through apparatus, and what this means in relation to perceiving gesture. This discussion is then examined in terms of mime and does so to problematise reducing gesture to nothing more than a response to the apparatus (Section 4.4.1).

Third, a reading of phenomenology and the body is provided. This is used as a response to potential mind/body dualisms that arise from conceptualising gesture as a symbolic movement by presenting gesture to be experiential. The phenomenology presented here begins with a discussion of Husserl’s philosophical inquiry into the status of knowledge in the Western sciences, and some of his methods for resolving the problems he believed to be implicit in those productions of knowledge; methods including bracketing and reduction (Section 4.5.1). Following this discussion, more prominently, the chapter examines the conceptualisation of the body as an incarnate consciousness within the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty that results in some new important methodological caveats for any inscription or interrogation of gesture and the body (Section 4.5.2).

Ultimately, by the end of this chapter, phenomenology is forwarded as a potential methodological process of discussing gesture beyond any mind/body dualism denoted by symbolic movement definitions.

4.2 Review of literature examining gesture within selfie research

It is important to establish how the concept of gesture has informed existing selfie research before more specific analysis into gesture as disposition commences. Unlike the mirror, gesture is not as central within the literature available. Four texts contend with the topic of gesture explicitly (excluding other instances where the term is mentioned but not fully realised). These texts are “The selfie as image (and) practice: Approaching digital photography” (Eckel et al., 2018), “Selfie reflexivity: Pictures of people talking photographs” (Ruchatz, 2018), “What does the selfie say? Investigating a global phenomenon” (Senft & Baym, 2015), and, perhaps most centrally, “The gestural image: The selfie, photography theory, and kinesthetic sociability” (Frosh, 2015) that was later adapted into a chapter titled “Selfie: The digital image as gesture and performance” (2019) in the book *The Poetics of Digital Media*. Perhaps most interesting, and difficult is that even within such a small sample of articles the definitions of the word “gesture” are oftentimes at odds with one another: gesture as in a gift and practice (Senft & Baym, 2015, p. 1589), gesture as a pose (Ruchatz, 2018), or gesture as an image of a movement (Frosh, 2015; 2019). What this results in is not a consolidated collection of writings on the selfie as a gesture, but rather several writings on several definitions of gesture and how these are applied to the selfie in considerably different ways. Immediately, then, to say that the selfie is a gesture becomes more of a hindrance when deciphering the ontology of this thing as it does not assuage any categorical difficulties. In short, as this literature reveals, to say the selfie is a gesture certainly expands the definition, however, it does so in several different directions.

“What does the selfie say? Investigating a global phenomenon” (2015) by Senft and Baym and “The selfie as image (and) practice: Approaching digital photography” (2018) by Julia Eckel, Jens Ruchatz and Sabine Wirth both enlist the word “gesture” to expand the definition of the selfie, but in dissimilar ways. Senft and Baym write that the selfie is “a photographic object...[and] also a practice—a *gesture* [emphasis

added] that can send (and is often intended to send) different messages to different individuals, communities, and audiences [which] may be dampened, amplified, or modified by social media” (2015, p. 1589). Eckel et al. similarly write that what qualifies certain images as selfies is when “they show the *gesture*... that indicates that the subject controlling the shutter release button of the camera is also the object of the picture” (2018, p. 4). In both cases the definition of gesture is different. For Senft and Baym the word “gesture” is used in the sense of a communicative gift (a nice gesture: offering to drive someone to the airport in lieu of public transport, see Ingraham 2020 on gestures of concern). However, in Eckel et al. gesture is used in terms of an arrangement of the body: the outstretched arm. Not a movement in and of itself, but evidence of a movement.

A third definition of the term gesture is found in Ruchatz’s chapter. The presented research stems from a Google image search wherein a search for the word “selfie” does not result in self-portrait photographs exclusively but instead images “of people taking selfies” (2018, p. 49). These images are referred to within the research as “selfie scenes” and depict a pose “that render the scene readable as such” (2018, p. 53). What the research manages to effectively demonstrate is that this pose resulted in various rather strong reactions from those who witnessed it. Ruchatz examines articles by Megan Koester (2014) featuring selfies taken in a place deemed inappropriate: such as art galleries and the 9/11 memorial in New York City. What Ruchatz notes is that it is not the captured image of the selfie that resulted in such strong reactions, but the pose itself: the pose of an arm-outstretched and the device being looked into.¹⁷ Ruchatz does give some mention to how the body is arranged into this pose, but his concerns are primarily with what this pose signifies to others; as Flusser writes, and as shall be discussed below, the ability for a gesture to create meaning is a result of its ability to be perceived by others (2014, p. 74, 107). However, Ruchatz does not delve too deeply into the body within the research, but instead, the body is understood as a sign that when arranged in a particular fashion results in a strong reaction.

¹⁷ Anecdotally, this section is being drafted in the week of the domestic terror attack on the US capitol building of January 6th 2021. One of the repeatedly shared images was that of a terrorist taking selfies within the Capitol. The pose was seen as a sign of disrespect and journalist Don Winslow offered €20,000 to anyone that could identify a particular selfie taker (Winslow, 2021)

It is Frosh's article that deals with gesture and the embodying process of engaging in selfie practice the most extensively. Frosh writes that this gesture is "simultaneously *mediating* (the outstretched arm executes the taking of the selfie) and *mediated* (the outstretched arm becomes a legible and iterable sign within selfies of, among other things, the selfiness of the image)" (2015, p. 1611). In other words, it is both the movement of the body and the signifying potential of this movement that makes a selfie what it is. However, for Frosh there is a third dimension and that is in relation to this gesture as a form of embodying indexicality: that is to say it situates the subject of the photographic-object as a selfie taker. The movement becomes a phatic expression, one which is unstructured and socially inclusive to others partaking in the gesture by witnessing it.

What is most important within both Ruchatz and Frosh's research is not the act of this specific gesture, but the ability for this action to be seen by others. In other words, an individual can take a selfie by outstretching their arm looking at the camera and producing an image, and this is therefore defined as a gesture. However, a second individual or group of individuals can also witness this action and make meaning through what this pose *signifies* (discussed in Section 4.3). The same gesture can be perceived from various locations. This becomes a matter of visibility, as the gesture of the selfie becomes an imaginary mirror bouncing its image back to the subject and to anybody else who can see it. Or expressed another way, a gesture is both something that is done with the body, and gesture is also how a movement of the body communicates a message in how it is seen. In short, the subject of the selfie is the individual who takes it and any individual who witnesses this taking.

For this reason, gesture is frequently defined as a "symbolic movement" (Flusser, 2014, p. 3). On the one hand, it is symbolic as the pose struck by the body can produce meaning: intentionally or not. On the other hand, beyond the symbolic, gesture is also a movement of the body. How the body acts, how the body moves. There are two registers here in which meaning is produced by the body, and both are equally complex. The selfie when discussed in the literature above is both simultaneously and discretely defined as each: shown to be symbolic at the level of gesture, but also discussed as gesture at the level of movement of the corporeal body. However, there is an unresolved tension between the symbolic and movement side of this concept. This distinction is the difficulty implicit with any research into gesture,

expressed succinctly by Olenina and Schulzki who note the twofold challenge of navigating the “encumbrance of utterances leading to gesticulation on the one hand [the symbolic] and the methodological problem of accounting for- and adequately referencing all nuances of the bodily act [the movement] on the other” (2017, p. 2).

To complicate matters more so, consider this difficulty in relation to the novel selfie interface. The novel interface requires an arranging of the body—the outstretching of the arm, the look into the screen, the resulting compression of space—, while simultaneously being seen as a sign: the selfie taker is looking at themselves in this pose. It, therefore, becomes difficult to bifurcate the two registers of the symbolic and the movement of the body in the case of this gesture as there is an overlapping and a form of production that occurs within this interfacing. Therefore, to understand the selfie as a gesture requires a method for articulating gesture as both something the body does, and something the body can be seen doing. As the body moves and it is seen it responds with movements which are perceived, and this continues for a variable time as various strata of meaning and movement unfold and produce one another. Therefore, a new framework for understanding gesture and the selfie is required, and the development of this framework is central to this chapter.

4.3 The symbolic register of gesture: Gesture as something seen

Semiotics becomes a possible method for analysing gesture as the term “symbolic” (as used above in the context of gesture as a symbolic movement) is used to indicate the role of the gesture as a *sign*. It is a sign as it is seen and it creates meaning. As a sign, then, gesture can be understood as having a particular semiology. Firstly, the pose of the body and how it is perceived and seen by others is a *signifier* as it is the material, perceptible, and physical form of the sign. However, simultaneously, this sign also has a *signified* which is the concept attached to this signifier. In the case of Ruchatz’s work, for example, the signifier is the selfie-scene that is posed with the outstretched arm holding the device, however, the signified is the idea that this pose in this place is inappropriate. Therefore, in terms of the symbolic movement definition of gesture, the word symbolic refers to how the gesture creates meaning and communicates a message.

To quote Flusser, gestures create meaning in the “symbolic dimension [and words] such as ‘code,’ ‘message,’ ‘memory,’ and ‘information’ do occur frequently in the discourse of communication” (2014, p. 3) when talking about gesture. The vocabulary of Barthes becomes clear, as Flusser writes that it “follows that images are not ‘denotative’ (unambiguous) complexes of symbols (like numbers, for example) but ‘connotative’ (ambiguous) complexes of symbols: They provide space for interpretation” (2000, p. 8). Denotations and connotations are central tenets of Barthes’s semiology, and it is a distinction he developed following the work of linguist Louis Hjelmslev (Allen, 2003, p. 50) and explored at length in his seminal *Elements of Semiology* (1995, pp. 89-94). Denotation—the possible intended meaning of a sign—and connotation—a possible implied or accepted meaning—operate simultaneously from a single sign and are connected through a process of signification. This process of signification is something that a gesture goes through when it is seen by others. Barthes demonstrated this through the now-famous example of the young boy saluting on the cover of *Paris-Match* (1972, pp. 115-116). The signification occurs at the level of how they sign, when seen, brings with it an immense history and steps forward into a complex series of myths that are signified through the complex matrix of denotations occurring. The gesture of the salute means many things not only due to the complex arrangement of signs—the inferred flag, the implicit nationalistic syllogism, the race of the child, the capacity of the uniform—but means many things as all gestures are fecund with meaning. Gesture is, simply, never exclusively a movement of the body but a form of signification.¹⁸

In terms of how this signification occurs through the body, it is worth turning to the discipline of linguistics as various researchers within this field (cited below) have been contending with this problem inherent to gesture (the problem of the difficulty discerning the symbolic and movement register). Linguistics offers unique methodological insights into the body and its implicit signification. However, there is a distinct separation between the body and the speech-act within linguistics. This separation is indeed a historical one that dates to the writings of Quintilian and his work on the *actio* where gesture is defined as: “the bodily performance that comes along with speech” (in Müller et al., 2013, p. 55). In a chapter titled “Gesture and speech from a linguistic perspective: a new field and its history” research is

¹⁸ Pertinent and detailed examinations of this sign can be read in Moriarty (1996), Holland (2008), and Moudileno (2016).

presented that traces the history of movement and speech from antiquity, through the renaissance until gesture was finally thrown “into the wastebasket of *parole* or language use” following the rise of semiology (Müller *et al.*, 2013, p. 56). However, the concept was revitalised in the 1990s and early 2000s by a variety of linguists who no longer dismissed gesture and rather considered it as “a central part of linguistic analysis” (2013, p. 59). Put another way, gesture was seen as another speech-act, and following the collapsing of the distinction of *parole* and *langue* through semiological study, gesture was given new-found attention (based upon the foundational work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1959)). Fundamentally, gesture was reconsidered as an extension of speech with attention being paid to co-speech gestures. The movements of the hands (primarily) were defined as a method to reinforce, support, emphasise or articulate the words of the mouth. In some cases, the hands become replacements for words when verbal communication was either not needed (such as a wave) or not possible (the ever-present image of the tourist in a foreign nation attempt to compensate for their lack of communicability, referred to as moulding). Ultimately, within this discipline, the study of gesture is the study of the movement of the body and its relationship to a speech act (*parole*). A speech act is how an individual expresses and articulates the various codes and systems governed by a language (*langue*, here meaning both a system of signs and a social institution (see Barthes, 1995, p. 14)): a speech act is language in use.

This newfound attention was most certainly a result of the influence left on linguistics by scholars of the American school of gesture known as kinesics. In an essay on the subject, leading voice on the matter Ray Birdwhistell defines kinesics as follows:

Kinesics is the science of the body of behavioural communication. Any person who has ‘learned how to behave in public’ and is at all aware of his response to the awkward or inappropriate behaviour of others recognizes the importance of body motion behaviour to social interaction. It is more difficult to conceive that body motion and facial expression belong to a learned coded system and that there is a ‘language’ of movement compared to a spoken language, both in its structure and in its contribution to a systematically ordered communicative *system*. (1978, p. 285)

A dichotomy is established between the movement (body motion behaviour) and the symbolic (social interaction) in this quote. The movements of the body in such an articulation (*parole*) “belong to a

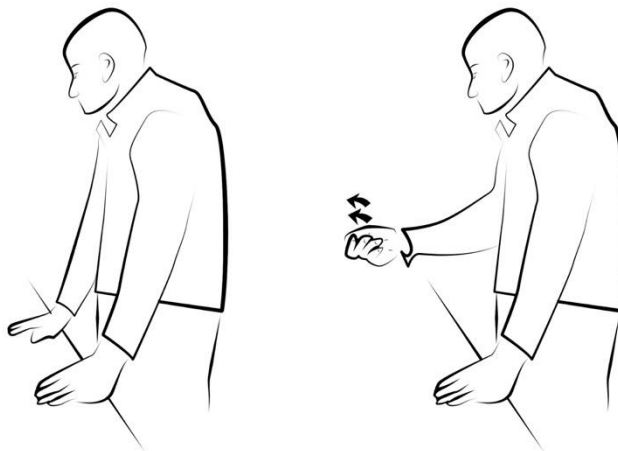
learned coded system”—a language—that can be decoded and understood as simply the result of a symbolic register.

This, then, became Birdwhistell’s pervading influence on the linguistic study of gesture as he developed a propaedeutic notation for attempting to record and transcribe such movements. His work was preoccupied with *kines* and *kinemes* that became transcribed with a collection of technical icons such as (bb \wedge V) indicating an eyebrow lift and return or the even more complex ($\wedge \frac{bb1}{O} \wedge$) that indicates a speaker who “‘de-expressionalize’ into a complex kinemorph of deadpan ($\wedge/O\wedge$); [who], without signalling a response, may continue vocalisation until the auditor [(speaker)] raises his brows (bb1/)” (Birdwhistell, 1978, p. 291).

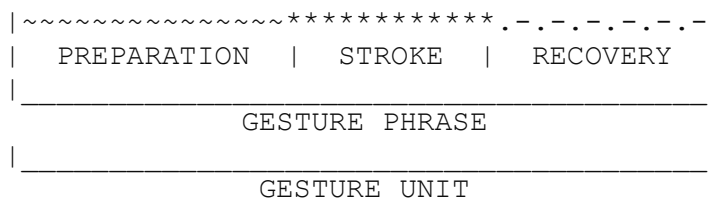
Birdwhistell’s work launched a discussion in linguistics that was concerned with developing a notation for recording the body (like how the harmonic style of 18th century European musicians is notated with clefs, breves, and crotchets). However, Adam Kendon has presented a more contemporary gestural notation. What is crucial to note in his writings is that Kendon differentiates between definitions of gesture as he argues the word gesture is no longer applicable to the specific phenomenon he is describing; that is, the movement of the hands with “semantic intent” (Kendon, 2013, p. 9). Instead, he calls such movements excursions and attempts to divide them into a variety of moments within the speech act. Gestures begin from the home position where the body—or more specifically the hands—are at rest or relaxing. When the hands are lifted with semantic intent the excursion begins, and it ends when the hands return to the rest position.

Kendon calls this a *gesture unit*. This gesture unit can be broken into *gesture phrases* of which each includes a *preparation* (raising the hands, indicated in notation as a tilde (~)) and a *stroke* (moving the hands, indicated in notation as an asterisk (*)). Once a phrase is completed there is a moment of *recovery* (indicated in notation as a dash/point combination (-.)) which involves bringing the hands back to rest. Figure 4.1 is an example of such notation taken from Kendon’s book and re-illustrated. The individual is using a gesture in the phrase: “And he used to go down there and throw ground rice over it” (The notation of (.....) indicted where the excursion occurred in the sentence):

Figure 4.1
Kendon's gestural notation example



(“He used to go down there and throw (.....) ground rice over it”.)

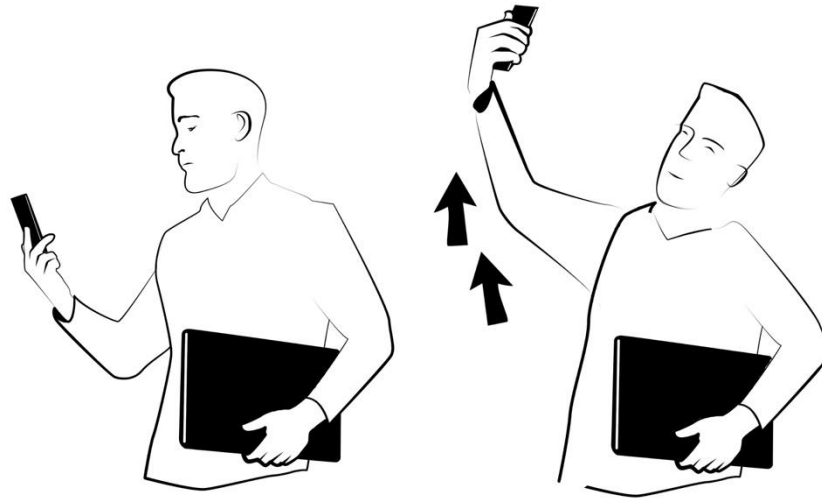


Note. Adapted from Kendon (2013, p. 168)

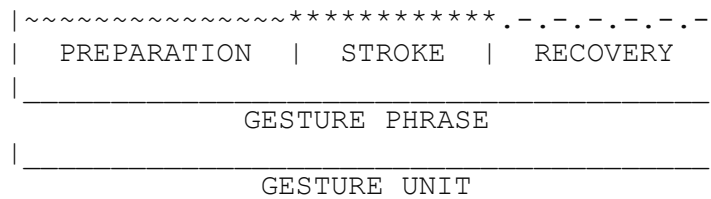
The notation developed by Kendon is a complex one and becomes a useful metric for illustrating and measuring these bodily excursions in a measured way. It is a transcription of bodily movement—and therefore it is an abstraction of this movement which separates it from its symbolic value. The notation of Kendon offers a descriptive method for recording the movement of the body separately from the speech-act taking place.

Regarding the selfie, this same notation can be used to transcribe it as a gesture (or rather an excursion). This is illustrated in Figure 4.2. The selfie begins in the hand at rest which is holding the mobile device. The excursion initiates when the arm is raised before the face (preparation ~) followed by a series of strokes (*, adjusting the head position with the aid of the digital mirror). Once the image is created, there is a moment of recovery (-.-) and the phone is brought back to rest. Admittedly there is no spoken sentence involved in this process, but the movement of the body can still be notated as such:

Figure 4.2
A selfie notated through Kendon's system (example 1)

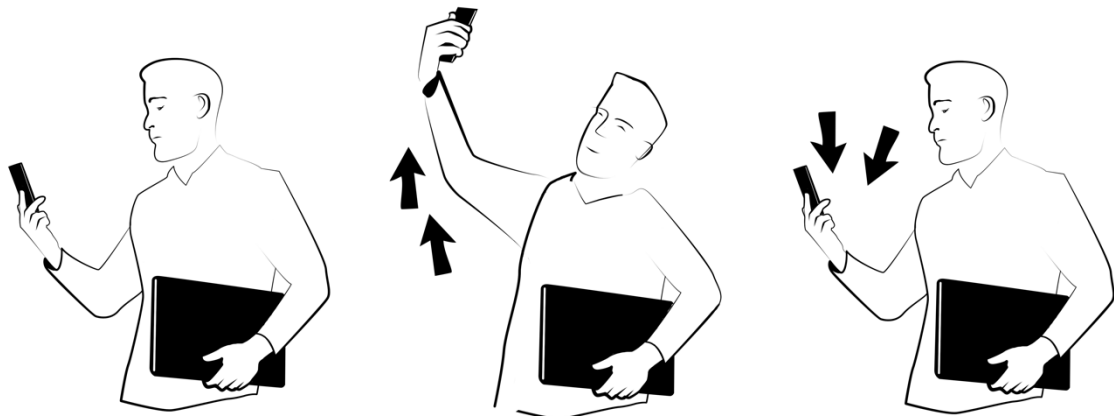


(The phone is lifted before the face and an image is taken.)



This does not complete the movement of the selfie. The initial recovery could become a second moment of preparation for once the mobile device returns to a rest position there is an option for viewing the image and taking more photos. Or, even, editing the image and sharing them online: a condition of the existence of the selfie. The gesture here encounters time differently, and the gestural notation becomes a very limited method for transcribing the selfie as a bodily movement. Perhaps instead the selfie should be notated as depicted as Figure 4.3 or Figure 4.4:

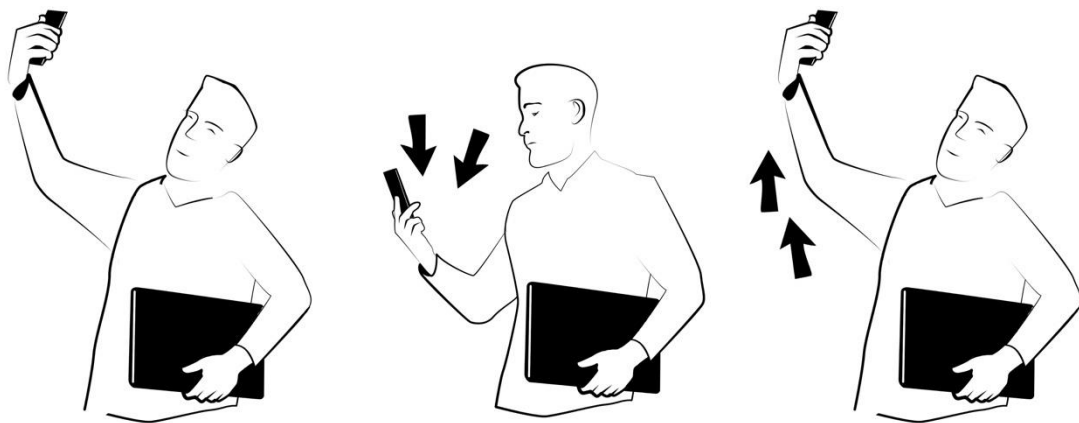
Figure 4.3
A selfie notated through Kendon's system (example 2)



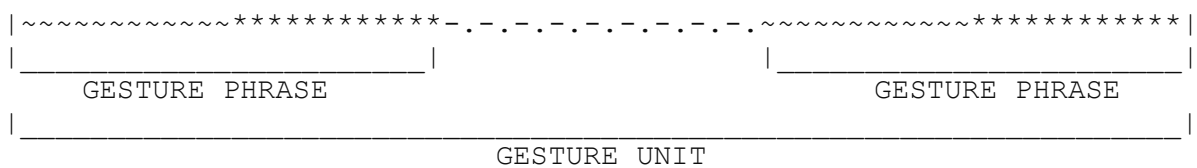
(A selfie is taken; the phone is brought down to edit or share some pictures.)



Figure 4.4
A selfie notated through Kendon's system (example 3)



(A selfie is taken, the phone is brought to a rest position, a second selfie is taken.)



This exercise illustrates the selfie as a gesture but undoubtedly reduces its complexity. What is being transcribed are abstractions of movements of the body, but this notation (and others like it such as Birdwhistell's) show quite readily how linguistic approaches to gesture reinforce the symbol/body dichotomy. There is, evidently, a preoccupation with a separation between the two facets of gesture: the body and how it accompanies the speech act. By maintaining this separation linguistics also evidences a more fundamental limitation of their discussion of gesture: meaning and body are established in a hierarchical relationship with the gestural corporality of bodily movement situated in a position that is an ancillary to the semantic conveyance of words. The spoken word is privileged over the body which speaks it.¹⁹

Ultimately, the body through such notations becomes a medium of emphasis or elaboration for speech. However, this leaves the body in an ancillary position and does not fully account for its place in gestural communication and as a result the body (as a perceiving, phenomenal thing) becomes silenced and subordinate to the spoken word. Or, in other words, *it is difficult to hear what the body says because of the meaning attached to gesture*. For example, take a simple wave: the hand is raised—perhaps through the movement of joints in the elbow and the shoulder (easily notated in Birdwhistell or Kendon's method), it is turned through pronation, so the palm faces away and the muscles in the forearm combined with the musculature surrounding the elbow cause the hand to move in space towards and away from the body. It is a wave—a singular movement. Meaning is attached to said movement after the fact. Even in those gestures created in absences of meaning: an odd twist of the wrist or a loose performance of the hands playing with an invisible object. In these more improvisational movements, the meaning attributed is often a meaning born from a speech act: the particularly recognisable movements of “what is this?” or “what is the word?”. There is a false and impossible break implied between the signifier (as movement) and the signified (as meaning).

¹⁹ In an article published for the Flusser Archives I argued that these forms of notation can be understood as a form of technical image. These technical images of the body were examined in relation to how these notations are used within Human Computer-Interaction (HCI). Notably, I posited how these (predominantly phonic gestures) were difficult to translate. Including this discussion here is well beyond the scope of this research (see Berkland, 2020).

4.3.1 Gestural misunderstandings within the symbolic register

What problematises this further is how gesture is seen by others, and how this can lead to a variety of misunderstandings. A clear presentation of the complexity of gesture is narrativised in a vignette within Campion and Lee's *Passionless Moments* (1983) titled "A neighbourly misunderstanding". In it, various gestures occur which result in a shared "third" gesture that creates the eponymous misunderstanding (the use of "third" is problematised in a moment). What this effectively demonstrates is that a gesture does not exist in isolation of other gestures and that the interaction of individuals can create ephemeral additional gestures from their symbolic movements of a perceptive body.²⁰

Within the film, the first gesture is a movement of the character Tony Formiatti. He injured his shoulder muscles in a friendly football match, and he rubs his shoulder and extends his arm upwards attempting to alleviate some discomfort (Figure 4.5). Simultaneously, the second gesture is conducted by Tony's neighbour, Jim Simpson. Simpson is scratching the back of his head somewhat vigorously, yet unknowingly in Tony's direction (Figure 4.6). Two gestures occur and are witnessed by each other as both men appear to be waving to one another in a comedic misunderstanding. As the narrator continues: "Tony thinks Jim is waving hello, and not wanting to leave unfinished something he unwittingly started he waves back and smiles" (Campion & Lee, 1983).

²⁰ An annotated description of these gestures along with the full vignette has been uploaded to YouTube. These can be viewed through the following link: <https://youtu.be/8hBn8t8bR2w>

Figure 4.6
Jim Simpson

Figure 4.5
Tony Formiatti

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Note. The *faux* wave between the two individuals.

A third gesture, at least within the register of the symbolic, emerges from the interaction: a wave between two individuals. The wave is not a result of these movements, but the context of these movements. It is crucial to note in the vignette that although the two men have never spoken, in being neighbourly the wave becomes an expectation. A fourth gesture occurs: Tony's wave-back to a wave which never occurred. Jim's refusal to acknowledge this—as seen through the brow-furrowing grimace on his face—can be understood as another gesture.

The use of “first”, “second”, “third” and “fourth” gestures serves a practical purpose but does a disservice to the complexity of the gestures that are occurring within this moment, especially since nothing is to be left unfinished (as the narrator poignantly remarks). Instead, it is perhaps better to examine it as a contiguity of moments that together intervolve into the singular phenomena. A *volume* is created between the two individuals, and within this volume a matrix of lines of sight are drawn across various movements of the body that result into a Markov chain of symbolic movements. A Markov chain is a model which describes a sequence of events, however the probability of the next event in sequence is based on the state of the previous event²¹. In the case of these gestures, gestures result in more gestures. Not one movement that begets another—as the initial shoulder adjustment and ear scratch appear to emerge in isolation—but rather an overlapping of meanings. The intention of the

²¹ Markov chains been used at length in the field of computational natural language-generation. Essentially, instead of simply developing a random series of words, the computation generates statements based upon words that precede it.

gesture will never exist in isolation of this series of lines. This series of lines will always describe the volume of relations between individuals gesturing and those witnessing those gestures.

The complexities of the symbolic register of gesture are myriad. However, what is most important to note in context of this study is how the ability to create meaning through gesture—intentionally or not—will always result in a volume of relations. The use of the term “volume” is specific and twofold: first, it is a volume of relations as it is a designation or description of space, second it is a volume as volume denotes an intensity, parameter, or degree (discussed in Section 6.2). Applying this discovery to the selfie reveals that a selfie is not just an image that can be seen but also a pose that can be seen. The work of both Frosh and Ruchatz demonstrate that what is seen is not just the body, but the movement of the body and therefore the movement itself is implicit in the creation of any symbolic meaning.

But gesture is not exclusively the creation of meaning and the role of the body is required to fully conceptualise the phenomena of the selfie as gesture is not just a sign, but a sign expressed and articulated by a body. To consolidate the selfie as a gesture what needs to be understood is how the body acts, how the body moves, and the context that allows for these movements to (not) occur. However, before this discussion commences one methodological caveat is required. In the remainder of this chapter the term “body” refers to a human or animal body. Such a description of the body is reductive as it appears to suggest that the body can be a neutral site. This is not the case, as a body (human or otherwise) will always be politically, socially, and culturally inscribed. The neutrality of the use of the term body here is by no means in ignorance of this, rather it serves the purely methodological purpose for dealing with the movement component of gesture. Notions and complexities of the body are readily expanded upon in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

4.4 The corporeal register of gesture: Gesture as something done

The possible movements of the body are complex, and what is being discussed here is the movement of the body in terms of intentionality. For this purpose, the movements of the body could be sub-divided into four categories: the first being non-voluntary or unintentional, the fourth being intentional and voluntary. Category two would include semi-voluntary movements, and category three movements that

are unconscious. A list such as this is only presented to demonstrate how such categorisation is impossible and will be problematised immediately. However, it is still worth noting as it reveals *how* individuals could possibly categorise movements of the body.

1. *Completely non-voluntary movement.* These are movements of the body caused by exterior forces acting upon it. For example, an individual in a car accident has their body flung through the windshield, or someone is forcibly pushed, or a chair someone is sitting on collapses. In these instances, the body moves completely involuntarily. Key to note is that although the movement in such instances is involuntary, the response to these sudden movements of the body is reactive, and perhaps voluntary. When an individual falls, for example, they draw their arms before their face to protect it.
2. *Semi-voluntary or involuntary movement.* A result of neurological movement disorders such as ataxia, chorea, dystonia, or sudden repetitive bodily tics. A complex taxonomy of movements either regarded as the result of neurological disorders or other habits. An individual living with Tourette's Syndrome may exhibit tics. Generally, such semivoluntary or involuntary movements are either motor movements (rapidly blinking eyes) or phonic movements (such as sounds made when breathing).
3. *Unconscious or homeostatic movements.* Breathing, blood flow, pupil dilation, heartbeat and so on. Movements the body uses to regulate a variety of different aspects to maintain life or adjust to surroundings. The skin on the body tightens when experiencing a drop in temperature or breathing can increase when engaged with physical exercise to provide oxygen to the lungs and skeletomuscular system. The process of reading this thesis, regardless of how still you are sitting, will involve such movements of the body.
4. *Intentional or active movements of the body.* Using the body to accomplish something. A wave of the arm, walking, reaching for an object, swinging a tool. Movements that can be said to have intentionality. It is within these intentional movements that gesture occurs, according to linguistics, but not always, as seen in the neighbourly misunderstanding.

The immediate problem with such a list is that no single movement of the body can exist in any category exclusively. Perhaps an individual raises an arm to wave (category 4, conscious movement), other functions of the body modify to allow this to happen (category 3, unconscious movements). If an individual trips and falls the forces on their body are completely nonvoluntary (category 1), but what about when the arms are brought forward to break this fall? This is referred to as a reflex. Are these movements voluntary or reflexive; and, more critical to consider, are reflexive movements semi-voluntary or unconscious? Also, do some of the movements fit into different categories for different

individuals? A professional athlete controls their heart rate and breathing relinquishing the grip of homeostasis: is such breathing therefore conscious, and, perhaps, gestural? Gestures are seemingly conscious movements of the body, but this is complicated further when it comes to the matter of intentionality. As Flusser writes (2014, p. 1): “‘Gestures are movements of the body that express an intention.’ But this is not very serviceable. For ‘intention’ needs to be defined, and because it is an unstable concept that involves issues of subjectivity and freedom, it will surely get us into difficulties”.

Consider intentionality in terms of the broader debates regarding movements of the body that underpinned various discussions within twentieth-century Western theorising and philosophy. Marcel Mauss’s influential essay on the movements—what are called techniques—of the body (1973) argued that movements of the body were culturally inscribed and dictated through social and cultural knowledges and power: a collection of forces that are described by Mauss with the term “*habitus*” (1973, p. 73). The concept of the *habitus* was a central pillar for understanding how movements and manners of the body were executed. This term was developed through the research of Pierre Bourdieu (becoming one of his most influential concepts) where he examines how a body—within its *habitus*—develops a *hexis* that “speaks directly to the motor function, in the form of a pattern of postures that is both individual and systematic, being bound up with a whole system of objects, and charged with a host of special meanings values” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 74) or, as commentator Richard Jenkins writes, the bodily *hexis* “is used to signify deportment, the manner and style in which actors ‘carry themselves’: stance, gait, gesture, etc.” (1992, p. 46). Within Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, the body is described as having a disposition through which it acts, and this disposition is by and large determined, or in the very least influenced, by the social and cultural organisation of the the *habitus* that it inhabits; with disposition defined by Bourdieu as being “a way of being, a habitual state” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 214).²²

The idea that bodily movements were socially determined fundamentally problematises notions of intent and intentionality, and because of the considerations raised by Mauss and Bourdieu, it became a question of who or what was determining the movements of the twentieth-century Western body. The

²² The term was later elaborated in *The Logic of Practice* (Bourdieu 1990, pp. 43-44; see Jenkins, 1992, p. 47).

culprit here was capital insofar as repeated, *unconsciously* incarnate human movement “became considered key to the production of wealth” (Henriques et al., 2014, p. 13). It is through rationalisation and synchronization that “the actions and gestures of workers [became] regular unified patterns” (Henriques *et al.*, 2014, pp. 13-14). The human body becomes the human machine that is nothing more than weights and levers. As Anson Rabinbach writes, “the human body and the industrial machine were both motors that converted energy into mechanical work. The automata no longer had to be denied a soul—all of nature exhibited the same protean qualities of the machine” (1990, 2). Henriques et al. go on to cite Foucault’s biopolitics of the body: “the controlled insertions of bodies into machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes” (1978, p. 141). Seemingly gesture in the early twentieth century became subject to the apparatus through regimentation. Such thinking around how the apparatus defines the body is partially the result of the endeavour through modernity to grammatize the body. The apparatus, as per Adorno, made “gestures precise and brutal [...as the] movements machines demand of their users already have the violent, hard-hitting, unresting jerkiness of Fascist maltreatment” (1951, p. 40).

Within the methodological confines of theories of the apparatus, the movements of the body are seldom those of the individual perpetuating them. Agamben (as cited in Section 3.3) writes that the gestures of the individual are completely changed in the context of the apparatus (2009, pp. 12, 14-15). In a chapter, “Notes on gesture” (2000), this sentiment is established in the epigraph: “*by the end of the nineteenth century, the Western bourgeoisie had definitely lost its gestures*” (2000, p. 49). Arguably, these gestures were not lost as an edict on the fundamental changes experienced by the body in the twentieth century through various apparatus, rather they were lost insofar as their intentions and deliberations were already desubjectified through the confinement and capturing of these technologies. However, while Agamben certainly posits this thesis, the complexity of the work is in how technologies of the time—film cameras in particular—allowed for a shift and change in the perception of how the body was defined through various networks of power. Technologies such as the camera allowed gestures to be seen *ex situ* as adumbrations of the original movements (2000, pp. 50-53). Therefore, not only were

gestures determined by apparatus, but these same apparatus determined how these gestures were perceived.

Agamben's research (2009) does not inspire much hope in the face of the apparatus and the movements available to it; his explication of desubjectification (as discussed in the Chapter 3) makes it impossible to use an apparatus correctly (2009, p. 21) as those who let themselves "be captured by the 'cellular telephone' apparatus—whatever the intensity of the desire that has driven [them]—cannot acquire a new subjectivity, but only a number through which [they] can, eventually, be controlled" (2009, p. 21). This is perhaps Agamben at his most Foucauldian, and his description of the use of the mobile phone is not dissimilar to the images of the good handwriting model of *Discipline and Punish* which shows "a whole routine whose rigorous code invests the body in its entirety, from the points of the feet to the tip of the index finger" (Foucault, 1977, p. 152).

Key to these arguments and the central aspect that should be considered in terms of this research and wider discussions on gesture is whether a movement can be intentional in terms of the apparatus. While Agamben discusses this in terms of correct use, what about intentional use? Can a selfie have any authentic or accurate representations of a body if the movements implicit within selfie-taking are dictated through the apparatus? Can the interface of the novel selfie apparatus be anything more than a Maussian technique? The problem is then compounded as gesture always speaks (in terms of the symbolic register). Therefore, a methodological aporia arises as it becomes difficult to return to the body in and of itself as the contrivances of both language and apparatus are always implicit within any movements of the body.

This emerged as a central response to those individuals writing in terms of the body and language, and the body and apparatus. A unique avenue for attempting to understand the difficulty the body faces expressing itself in relation to the apparatus can be seen in the research and practice conducted by mime artists. Mime as a methodology for understanding the gestures of the body was an attempt to experience the body beyond any external factors or influences of gesture as symbolic movement. It was, arguably, an attempt to return the body to pure intentionality and experience. It would be valuable to

turn to mime briefly as a practice that attempted to allow the body to speak in absence of spoken language.

4.4.1 Corporeal mime and the moving body

In Pierre Oléron's work on the gestures of the deaf-mute titled "Against the reproducibility of gesturality to speech" it is argued that purely symbolic readings of gesture—understanding gesture purely in terms of a semiology—are impossible as gesture cannot be understood in terms of discrete divisions (such as the notations of Kendon above). Oléron suggest that gesture be understood through mimicry and wrote that "le langage mimique n'est pas seulement langage mais encore action et participation à l'action et même aux choses" ["mime language is not only language but also action and participation in action and even in things"] (1952, p. 51). This research was expanded by Julia Kristeva (1978, p. 267) who in a later article on gesture argues that to fully understand the gestures of the body it is required that theorising on gesture should "free [itself] from the basic schemata of linguistics, to elaborate new models on new *copora*, and to enlarge, *a posteriori*, the power of linguistic procedure itself; and thus... revise the very notion of language, understood no more as communication but as production" (language being an apparatus in this context).

Kristeva's work will be returned to below, but Oléron's reference to mime language is very much a direct reference to the corporeality of the body which became central to mime and pantomime as a mode of expression. While the origins of mime are attributed to Étienne Decroux, the influence of his teacher Jacques Copeau and the return to the body through intellectual thought during the early 20th century certainly had a large impetus on the rise of corporeal mime as a means of expression through the silent body. Pointedly, returning to mime will allow for a more fully conceptualised discussion of gesture as the practice was an attempt to return to purely corporeal gesturality.

Copeau's influence on mime is a result of his disdain and rejection of the opulence and decadence of Parisian theatre of the early 1900s—which could plausibly be read as a social apparatus. In response, he wrote: "pour l'œuvre nouvelle, qu'on nous laisse un plateau nu" ["for this new work, let us make the stage bare"] to "return to an empty, open performing space" (Leabhart, 1989, p. 20). Copeau believed

that the bare, empty stage would allow for new meaning and arguably act as a means of unfolding the body outside of the confines of *habitus*. In other words, there was an attempt to empty the stage of meaning (not unlike how many believe the mirror to be empty). In a typically modernist sense, Copeau wanted to “make it new” and he did so by emptying the stage. Of course, the bare platform was soon occupied by the body of the performer and the propensity of the body to enter a symbolic register was brought with it (as the body-seen produces a sign). In response to this, he developed a new method of teaching theatre and opened the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier which offered a wide variety of classes as part of its liberal education. Central to this was corporeal mime. Students of the course referred to the class as the mask as Copeau became preoccupied with the body’s ability to communicate *sans* speech. During the class the students...

wore expressionless masks (at first only a scarf wrapped over the face), the body as bare as decency would allow. Diminishing the potential of the face to communicate meant that the rest of the body would need to take on that role in addition to its own. This simple premise gave birth to modern mime. (Leabhart, 1989, p. 26)

The emergence of corporeal mime resulted in the body becoming *pure médium* through which ideas were communicated. The body would mediate concepts and ideas suggested by Copeau to his students. These movements were largely improvisational, and Copeau would request to express a variety of different concepts: the birth of spring, wind, a change of seasons, or, perhaps, Paris.

What is important to note here is that within these early experiments, there is less concern with the body and instead it was *the body as the médium* that would allow for a rebirth of the theatre. It was Etienne Decroux who later was fascinated by the body in and of itself. In his treatise on the subject, *Words on Mime* (1985), he embellishes on the experience of the class and how the bodies exhibited meaning:

We mimed simple actions: a man pestered by a fly, wants to rid himself of it; a woman disappointed by a fortune teller, strangles her; the actions used in trade or a sequence of movements made by a machine... The manner of playing resembled the slow motion of film. But while that is the slowing down of fragments of reality, ours was the slow production of *one gesture in which many others were synthesised*. (1985, p. 4)

Once again, in Decroux's quote, there emerges a volume of relations between a variety of movements and a crucially important aspect of gestures of the body becomes apparent: one gesture in which many others were synthesised speaks to the volume of relations already demonstrated in Section 4.3.1 at the level of signification. Within mime there are no discrete gestures: there is a constant collapse and development of gesture upon gesture upon gesture. This constant expression through movements of the body is why Oléron and Kristeva (for example) write not in terms of gesture, but in terms of *gesturalité*. Not the existence of a single gesture, but gesture as a mode of production.

The value of the corporeal mime developed by Copeau and Decroux is best exemplified through the teaching of Jacques Lecoq who writes that "mime is literally to embody and therefore understand better" (Lecoq, 2000, p. 22). Like Copeau and Decroux before him, Lecoq believed individuals had experienced *a forgetting of the body* and in doing so the existence could not be fully comprehended and understood. As he writes:

A person who handles bricks all day long reaches a point where he no longer knows what he is handling. It has become an automatic part of his physical life. If he is asked to mime handling a brick, he rediscovers the meaning of the object, its weight and volume. This has interesting consequences for our teaching method: miming is a way of rediscovering a thing with renewed freshness. *The action of miming becomes a form of knowledge.* (Lecoq, 2000, p. 22)

The image of the bricklayer is a pertinent metaphor for the body-within-apparatus already exemplified in the literature (cited in Section 4.4, above). The forgotten gestures of the individual can be returned to outside of the apparatus and mime, as a practice, is the act of considering movement as movement and not movement as gesture. How mime indirectly expands upon apparatus theory, however, is that within apparatus theory the figure of the worker within the machine is one who is subjugated through the machinations of various *power* relations (as discussed in Rabinbach, 1990; Henriques et al., 2014 or the handwriting diagrams of Foucault, 1977, p. 152, for example). The concern of mime was with how this level of control, the forgetting, the *invisibility*, of gesture was not a result of power but rather something that occurred at the level of an *embodied knowledge*. The automatic part of the physical life of the bricklayer was a *situated* and *embodied* experience of the world itself, that reinforced the stratagems of the apparatus. Here, the objective of educational mime becomes apparent: an approach towards an

incarnate consciousness, and exploration of the knowing and perceiving body. By revisiting the corporal, mime in many ways was attempting to reconfigure the very notion of language and return to processes of the body. The image of the bricklayer is returned to in Chapter 5.

Therefore, to understand the body as being subject to apparatus is not a matter of control exclusively. Rather it is a matter of knowledge, and this knowledge can only be fully conceptualised through the methods of phenomenology: not only at the level of epistemology or knowledge of the body, but as a mode of organising perception. Section 4.5 will turn to phenomenology, and this will then open a discussion with gesture in a way that can appreciate not the symbolic *and* corporeal register; but rather how these two aspects are, it is argued, completely inseparable.

4.5 Phenomenology and the perceptive body

The term incarnate consciousness used in Section 4.4 is taken from a chapter on Maurice Merleau-Ponty written by David Carr in the book *Existential Philosophers: Kierkegaard to Merleau-Ponty* (1967). However, it would be imprudent to begin directly with Merleau-Ponty as his writing is heavily indebted to the works of Edmund Husserl. Therefore, a summary of Husserl's project is needed before Merleau-Ponty's experience of the body can be attended to.

4.5.1 Husserl and Reduction

For Husserl, Western knowledge had emerged from what he called a "natural standpoint" (1982, p. 51). Erazim Kohák reminds a reader that the German word *natürlich* can mean "of or pertaining to nature" but it can also mean 'the familiar,' 'the customary,' 'the matter-of-fact'" (1978, p. 32): "naturally" or "of course". The natural standpoint was not merely an empiricist position developed via human nature, but rather a habitual method through which Western sciences approached knowledge. Kohák continues and writes that "when Husserl speaks of the natural standpoint, he is not claiming that some biological necessity forces metaphysics upon us but simply that the ingrained habits of our common sense" (1978, p. 32) have resulted in approaching knowledge in a conditioned way.

Ostensibly, the natural standpoint situated knowledge out there and separated it from the enquiring subject; a result of the prevailing mind/body dualism of the time. For Husserl, this meant that a natural standpoint excluded phenomena from any knowledge claims. Husserl argued that facts and essence (the eidetic aspect of experience) could not exist outside of any spatiotemporal existence and were therefore inseparable (1982, § 2). Or, to put this another way, facts “follow always nothing but facts” (Husserl, 1982, § 8) and thus an empirical science of fact is always lacking in an essential aspect of how something is understood. Husserl understood this as highly problematic and would argue that the natural standpoint had not only shaped how the West thinks, but it had resulted in the West creating an epistemological foundation of the world in its image (1982, § 1). Paul A. Komesaroff examines this dilemma in his book *Objectivity, Science and Society: Interpreting Nature and Society in the Age of The Crisis of Science* (1986) writing that Husserl believed “science had been left without a foundation and at the same time the special character of other disciplines had [become] undermined” (Komesaroff, 1986, p. 105). As Husserl himself writes, science no longer saw the “wood for the trees [and]... overlook[ed] the infinitudes of life and its cognition... that knock each other down and come to life again like the figures in a Punch and Judy show” (Husserl, 1969, p. 278).

Husserl set out to combat this natural standpoint in his text *Logical Investigations*, continuing into various volumes published as *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (referred to as *Ideas 1* or *Ideas 2*), and then throughout his intellectual career.²³ He attempted to develop an eidetic science of consciousness that allowed Western science to consider experience “in the concrete fullness and entirety with which they figure... [in the] stream of experience” (Husserl, 1982, p. 116). Experience—or more specifically how an individual experiences—was the

²³ Husserl engaged in his phenomenological project when his teacher—Franz Brentano—introduced him to the idea of intentionality. Brentano’s work was centred on the development of an “empirical psychology” (Bartok, 2005, p. 15) and therefore all psychological acts were intentional as they were “directed upon an object” (Müller, 1995, p. xix). In Brentano’s words he describes intentionality as a relation in which “two correlates can be found... one correlate is the act of consciousness [and] the other is that [object] which it is directed upon” (Brentano, 1995, p. 23). This idea had such a profound impact on Husserl that he redirected his intellectual pursuits away from logic and mathematics into the demesne of philosophy. With intentionality at hand, Husserl moved away from the pure mathematics of his earlier published works such as “On the concept of number” (1972) and *Philosophy of arithmetic: Psychological and logical investigations with supplementary texts from 1887-1901* (2003) and published his “first monumental work... Logical Investigations, wherein he describes himself as achieving his “break-through” [(Husserl, 1970, p. 43)] to phenomenology” (Cerbone, 2005, p. 11). Husserl would thank Brentano gushingly and declare that he had been “enlightened by [the] clarity... of [Brentano’s] ever-penetrating mind” (Ierna, 2015, p. 70) and would write that Brentano’s lectures gave him “the conviction... to choose philosophy as [his] life’s work” (Husserl, 1981, p. 342).

central momentum of Husserl's phenomenological project. Initially, it seemed apparent that Husserl wished to develop this new eidetic science to uncover how the structure of consciousness allowed an individual to perceive objects in their actuality. However, the dichotomy between the individual as a subject and the world as an object collapses within this framework through his method of reduction (discussed below). Reduction becomes a central methodological counterpoint to a natural science that allows a phenomenologist to better attend to experience. Ultimately, he wished to develop a method that he believed would not fall into the snares of a severely ingrained natural standpoint; and he believed he could avoid such crevasses through the development of a phenomenological ἐποχή ("epoché" 1982, § 32).

The phenomenological ἐποχή is an intellectual position from where a phenomenologist can attend to experience. This position is founded "through the method of bracketing". He writes:

[By bracketing] I disconnect [all sciences which relate to this natural world], I make absolutely no use of their standards, I do not appropriate a single one of the propositions that enter into their systems, even though their evidential value is perfect, I take none of them, no one of them serves me for a foundation—so long, that is, as it is understood in the way these sciences themselves understand it, as a truth concerning the realities of the world. (Husserl, 1982, p. 110)

This bracketing appears almost Cartesian, a form of radical doubting, but this is not the case. Husserl reiterated and confirmed that he did not deny nor doubt the world, but rather wanted to create a space that "completely bars [him] from using any judgment that concerns spatio-temporal existence" (1982, p. 111). Details of some of the things he wished to bracket can be seen at the beginning of § 56 of *Ideas I* where he states unequivocally that "it goes without saying that with the suspending of the natural world, physical and psychological, all individual objectivities which are constituted through the functional activities of consciousness in valuation and practice are suspended" (1982, p. 171). This process—this creation of a phenomenological ἐποχή—is what Husserl describes methodologically as a *reduction*. "It's explicit bracketing", Husserl writes, which has "the bearing on method that they continually remind us that the relevant spheres of Being and Knowledge lie, in principle, outside those which require to be studied in the way proper to transcendental phenomenology" (1982, p. 179). Through reduction and

the return to the ἐποχή, phenomena could be realised more fully no longer contaminated by a natural standpoint.

Husserl's centring of the body within the ἐποχή is also a response to one of his fundamental criticisms of Cartesian dualism. This is evidenced in a passage from *Ideas 2*:

To say that this Ego, or the soul, "has" a Body does not merely mean that there exists a physical—material thing which would, through its material processes, present real preconditions for "conscious events" or even, conversely, that in its processes there occur dependencies on conscious events within a "stream of consciousness" Soul and psychic Ego "have" a Body; there exists a material thing, of a certain nature, which is not merely a material thing but is a Body, i.e., a material thing which, as localization field for sensations and for stirrings of feelings, as complex of sense organs, and as phenomenal partner and counterpart of all perceptions of things ... makes up a fundamental component of the real givenness of the soul and the Ego. (1989, § 40)

It is this dimension of Husserl's phenomenological method that arguably influenced the research of Merleau-Ponty. This centring or grounding of the body is a central thrust of Merleau-Ponty's most influential writing, *Phenomenology of Perception*, as it provides a new way of understanding the body and its relationship to phenomena.

4.5.2 Merleau-Ponty, the body and the limitations of reduction

There is the immediate problem of contending with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and that is in the very concept of "body" itself. As with other thinkers in the school of phenomenology, he is ardently anti-dualistic in his separation of both mind and body, yet the body itself still becomes a site of investigation. Fundamentally, consciousness and the world for Merleau-Ponty are mutually dependable parts of a whole: and at the centre—the zero point—of this whole is the perceiving body. It is not material, but phenomenological: an experience, or rather, a betweenness. This conceptualisation of the body runs throughout Merleau-Ponty's research and emerges in his unfinished final work *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964) where he writes:

The body interposed is not itself a thing, an interstitial matter, a connective tissue, but a *sensible for itself*... [it] unites us directly with the things through its own ontogenesis, by welding to one another the two outlines of which is made, its two laps: the sensible

mass it is and the mass of the sensible wherein it is born in segregation and, upon which, it remains open. (pp. 135-136)

It is a complex reading of the body that does away with mind/body dualism and consolidates them into a single term—body—which is an “incarnate consciousness” (Carr, 1967, p. 369). Throughout his work, “an idea of the body emerged that was radically different from the mechanical body... [and] instead of conceiving of the body as a highly complex machine... the habitual body—the phenomenal, the gestural, or better yet, the skilled body” (Jackson, 2017, p. 764). Such a conceptualisation of the body is radical and separates it from the body in linguistic theories of gesture, or the body determined in terms of the apparatus. The body here is not outside of the signs it can produce or beyond the frontiers of any apparatus; instead, the experience of these signs and the apparatus is always delineating the experiential possibilities of the body. This is not to say that the body can perceive the apparatus, or that the apparatus allows for the body to perceive in a particular way. What is essential to Merleau-Ponty’s work, instead, is that there is no perception outside of the development of any relationships; *the relationships themselves allow for the very possibility of how the body can be perceived.*

This is a development of Husserl’s conception of the body (*Leib*) where the body “is, in the first place the medium of all perception; it is the organ of perception and is necessarily involved in all perception” (1989, § 18). However, in Husserl’s work, the body can still be bracketed as part of the reduction process. This is impossible for Merleau-Ponty as all perception is a function of the body, not something that functions through the body (as medium) as “perception and action are not separate capabilities, but two sides of the same ability to engage with the world” (Romdenh-Romluc, 2013, p. 107). Knowing the world, then, and finding a place in it becomes an embodied process. Kormarine Romdenh-Romluc writes that Merleau-Ponty’s “account of perception implies that certain perceived properties result from interaction between the world and consciousness” (Romdenh-Romluc, 2013, p. 109).

Consider this for a moment not in terms of the apparatus, but in terms of the interfacing that allows to produce the selfie. Perception is not what allows for the relationship with the technology to develop; the relationship itself is a perceptual one. This same notion has a dramatic effect on how gesture is conceived of, and the gesturing body as “only embodied beings can be in meaningful situations like this,

so again it follows that embodiment is required for thought” (Romdenh-Romluc, 2013, p. 109). Gesture is not a movement of the body, but ultimately an additional vector of perception. However, before an elaboration of how these vectors of perception emerge in relation to the mobile device generally (Chapter 5), and the selfie specifically (Chapter 7), it is worth demonstrating how Merleau-Ponty evidences his philosophical elaboration of the body through a variety of case studies; the most central and revealing of which is the case of Johann Schneider (a 24-year-old who during the First World War was wounded when shrapnel entered the back of his head leaving him unconscious for four days).

4.5.3 Merleau-Ponty, Schneider and the Inbetweenness

Merleau-Ponty’s examination of Schneider’s case is heavily influenced by gestalt psychologists Adhémar Gelb and neurologist Kurt Goldstein who “brought to the attention of science a large number of cases where young and healthy men were suddenly transformed by brain injury into patients of a type only rarely encountered in times of peace” (Ellis, 1938, p. 315 quoted in Cerbone, 2006, p. 126). The case study examines Schneider’s motor intentionality and how the body—the object of incarnate consciousness—executes either abstract or concrete movements. Both movements are intentional, yet the patient finds abstract movements impossible to execute although he can manage a concrete movement with relative ease. An abstract movement is described as movements that are “not relevant to any actual situation, such as moving arms and legs to order, or bending and straightening a finger” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 118). For example, the ability to draw an infinity (∞) sign with a finger is an abstract movement. A concrete movement is that which is habitual and day-to-day. Schneider easily brushes his hair when handed a comb and mirror. Further, he manages to hold a job in a wallet factory (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 122). The reports on Schneider’s distinction between the abstract and concrete movements ultimately illustrate that motor intentionality is not simply a biomechanical response to a situation.

For example, if asked to mime or perform the action of a salute (to raise the hand to the forehead) Schneider finds such a movement of the hand impossible without undue preparation. He can accomplish this movement if he were to grab his wrist with his other hand and direct his hand to his

forehead, or, if he makes “the situation as ‘soldier-like’ as possible, adopting completely the stance and attitude of the soldier on duty... he can only salute to the extent that he succeeds in being a soldier in that moment” (Cerbone, 2006, p. 129). Therefore, if ordered to give such a salute, the patient does so with little hassle. A second example: during a conversation the patient finds it easy to slap a mosquito that is biting his leg, yet, if a doctor touches the same part of his body with a ruler, the patient cannot identify where on the body the ruler happens to be touching.

The details and specifics of Schneider’s movements are examined at length by others (Jackson, 2017; Timothy, 2011; Jensen, 2009), but the central contention that needs to be drawn from Schneider’s case is how movements come to be embodied in a subject. Motor intentionality appears to be stipulated upon an inbetweenness between what Merleau-Ponty calls “poles of action” (2012, p. 122). Schneider becomes an example of how “the body is no more than an element in the system of the subject and his world” (2012, p. 122). Or, if put into terms of the apparatus, the body cannot enter or make use of an apparatus as the apparatus requires a body to operate or function. The distinction between the body and the apparatus as two separate ontologies is a false distinction as they are determined together.

Ultimately, what is to be taken from Schneider’s case is how movements of the body offer an inbetweenness: a manifestation of the distance between the conscious thought or idea, and the proposed or intentional outcome of that idea. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

What [Schneider] lacks is neither motility nor thought, and we are brought to the recognition of something between movement as a third person process and thought as a representation of movement—something which is an anticipation of, or arrival at, the objective and is ensured by the body itself as a motor power, a “motor project” ... a “motor intentionality” (2012, pp. 126-127).

4.6 Chapter conclusion: Towards a phenomenology of gesture

This, ultimately, is the body beyond the symbolic movement definition of gesture: a perceiving thing; and it is the movement of this perceiving thing that allows for the creation of gesture. While the notations of linguistics attributed movement into their notations in some capacity, they never fully articulated the body before this movement, and this is where a significant limitation in more symbolic

theories of gesture resides when attempting to fully understand the selfie. The thing that waves, the thing that produces the thumbs-up, or a handshake should never simply be construed as a mechanical apparatus through which speech is emphasised as co-speech. Rather, following Merleau-Ponty, the incarnate consciousness that is implicit within its function should be remembered. It is through movement of the body that the body becomes manifest in a shared symbolic register. All movements within the volume of relations outlined earlier will in some capacity produce signs, discourse, and meaning; whether these are intended or not. However, what Merleau-Ponty reveals is that when the body moves into the symbolic register it does so as a perceiving thing. Summarised by David Carr, this perception is found “in the look, the reach, the walk, the mutual corroboration of the sense... [and] through the gesture, the body becomes expression, the bearer of meaning in the world” (1967, pp. 395-396). Or rather, as Vivian Sobchack explains, “the material body (the body that matters) enacts the gestalt of perception and radically *incorporates* and *lives* the irreducible structure of the sign and the genetic process of sign production” (1992, p. 76). Ultimately, a distinction between the corporeal and the symbolic becomes impossible and phenomenology as a method plays an important role in problematising work around gesture. Therefore, the role of phenomenology within this thesis—as demonstrated in this chapter—is less a mode of analysis in and of itself, but rather an epistemological caveat required before any close analysis of gesture and the apparatus is undertaken.

Staying with Merleau-Ponty and returning to gesture it would be beneficial to focus on the hand as a central facet of this inbetweenness. The human hand is undoubtedly one of the most complex and fascinating aspects of the body: not only as a prehensile, mechanical appendage but as a grasping manifestation of motor intentionality. In many ways, between the dualism of the mind and body, the prehensile hand emerges as the point between them: not the point that elucidates their alleged separateness, but rather the aspect of the body—the incarnate consciousness—that effectively dissolves them. Merleau-Ponty alludes to this and writes that consciousness “is in the first place not a matter of *I think that*’ but of *I can*’... [by] being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body” (2012, pp. 159-160).

More precisely, as shall be demonstrated, the hand—or more specifically virtual fingers—offer a mode of perceptions and a mode of being-in-the-world. In terms of selfie research, while an expanse of literature has been written on the body and the images produced through the relationship with the novel interface, it is required that the hand be understood as an additional vector of perception within this arranging regarding the novel selfie interface. Or, in other words, regardless of the mode of image in the mirror or the category of the image in the camera, the hand provides another vector of perception.

The following chapter begins with analysis.

5 GESTURE, THE HAND, AND DESUBJECTIFICATION: HOW GESTURES MOVE FROM BEING INVISIBLE TO BEING HUMAN

5.1 The role of the hand in the creation of the novel selfie interface

This chapter turns to the human hand and examines—and problematises—the role of the hand in extending the perceptual horizons of the body. The hand plays a vital role within the novel selfie interface as it is the hand that grasps the device (although not always nor exclusively). Although this is the justification for turning to the hand, the selfie itself is not central to this discussion: however, this discussion is imperative to further investigations of the selfie in Chapters 6 and 7.

This chapter begins with an elaboration on some key concepts for discussing the hand. Notably, the concepts of virtual fingers, grasping, and com-prehension (Streeck, 2009, pp. 47-51). These concepts are discussed in relation to “fit” (Cooley, 2004, p. 139) and how the mobile device becomes situated in the human hand. This reveals that it is not only the camera and mirror that should be considered when engaging with the novel selfie interface, but also the implications of grasping and comprehending the device through the hand. This leads to a discussion into how the selfie can be understood as “mixed media” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 260). To declare a medium as “mixed” in this regard refers to how all media is encountered through a sensory modality insofar as “perception is also always *synaesthetic* and *synoptic*... [meaning] our senses are modalities of perception and, as such, are co-operative and commutable” (Sobchack, 1992, p. 76). This allows for the selfie to be considered in terms of tactile media, which “implies the potential of being touched, of being perceived by the sense of touch, or even better, of being involved in a concrete act of touching” (Strauven 2021, pp. 24-25).

This vocabulary, and the methodological foundation it establishes, allows the phenomenological project of gesture introduced in Chapter 4 to be extended. In short, the mobile device is grasped and comprehended through fit, and thus tactile media can be discussed not exclusively in terms of touching but more specifically in terms of the device being held. This course of phenomenology then turns (once again) to Flusser’s research on gesture (2014). His description of phenomena as affect [*Gestimmtheit*] (2014, p. 5) leads to a broader reading on affect (however, this discussion of affect is deferred to

Chapter 6). Instead, Flusser's definition of gesture is (re)articulated in this chapter as a volume of relations that accounts for both phenomena and apparatus.

The chapter concludes with a study of two cases: the launch of the Apple iPhone in 2007 and a video of a chimpanzee that went viral in 2019. These two cases create a vector in the discourse of how gesture came to be understood: a vector that extends from *invisible* gestures to *human* gestures. Central to the launch of the iPhone was a resounding rhetoric of invisibility; however, these same gestures became spoken of as human gestures later (as shall be demonstrated). What this vector illustrates clearly is how desubjectification comes to pass as the near-arbitrary human quality of these gestures becomes axiomatic. The chapter attempts to examine the social and political machinations of this change: particularly regarding the postdigital epistemology alluded to in Chapter 1.

Ultimately, the chapter attempts to approach gesture from an explicitly interdisciplinary perspective if for no other reason than to wrench open the interstices between the various disciplines and means of talking about gesture. In doing so, it hopes to return to gesture as the disposition of the body and examines the implications of how this disposition is discussed in terms of the apparatus, the hand that grasps towards it, and what this means for perception.

5.2 The grasping hand, virtual fingers, and com-prehension

Linguist Jürgen Streeck explores the hand in his book titled *Gesturecraft: The Manufacture of Meaning* (2009). Streeck's work is distinguished from linguist research concerned with gesture and its relation to speech (such as Birdwhistell and Kendon examined in Section 4.3) as he "focuses on the meaning making in mundane practices of the world" (Müller et al., 2013, p. 62). His research into the hand is underpinned by the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (along with Heidegger and Polanyi) and is used to elaborate and enrich his comprehensive study of linguistics. However, it begins with the hand (unlike the entire body for the corporeal mimes) and he divides the human experience of the world into that which is in reach (can be taken or touched) and that which is further away beyond reach (Streeck 2009, p. 58).

Streeck firmly asserts that the hand is a “vehicle for being in the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 84). The hand is the primary site of gesture, and in Streeck’s conceptualisation of gesture, the language of the hand is polythetic as it is used to both find a place in the world through touching and grasping, while at the same time used to elaborate the spoken word. It is the act of active touch (see Gibson, 1962; Gibson, 1966; Wagner, 2016) that allows individuals to situate themselves within the world. He cites James Gibson and alludes to a type of embodied knowledge that is present in hand. As Gibson comments:

The sailor can feel the rope and tie the knot even in darkness. The violinist can feel the shapes and spaces of his instrument with extraordinary precision while keeping his eyes closed. The man with a walking stick can even feel stones, mud, or grass at the end of the stick. Yet all these perceptions come from between the contact of adjacent surfaces and the contacts of bones upon another. (1966, p. 112)

Streeck includes a litany of examples of this type of being-in-the-world developed through hands exemplifying the work of blacksmiths and jazz musicians. He states that this “type of knowledge has no place other than the hands in action; it cannot be abstracted, objectified, formulated in so many words or cast in rules” (Streeck, 2009, p. 56). Instead, such knowledge of the hands is inalienable and obtained through *active* repetitive motion associated with variable exercises. The hands create in the subject “personal knowledge” (see Polanyi, 1958), which can be understood as an embodied epistemology of the subject. Or, simply, the hand allows an individual to understand the world through their continued use.

For example, consider the figure of Willie, an individual documented in detail by Douglas Harper in *Working Knowledge: Skill and Community in a Small Shop* (1987). Willie is a craftsman and *bricoleur*²¹ whose “‘deep knowledge’ of materials [is a] corporeal and kinaesthetic knowledge” (Harper 1987, p. 9) apparent in the use of his hands. The visual ethnography of the title attempts to understand Willie’s

²¹ A *bricoleur* is an individual who undertakes the process of *bricolage*: a term that lacks an English equivalent but can inelegantly be understood as an individual who uses what is at hand (exemplified in the figure of jack-of-all-trades). The concept became a central point of discussion in Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *The Savage Mind* (1966) and is defined as someone “who works with [their] hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman” (1966, pp. 16-17). The critical potential of the term was later realised by Derrida who wrote that the *bricoleur* approaches practice and discourse and “tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogenous” (1978b, p. 360). The term is also used by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* when exploring the haecceitic “thisness” of production in which there is no object (1977, p. 7). Haecceity is explored in detail in Chapter 6.

working—or rather gesturing—hands through a series of photographic images of the hands in the process of performing a task. Throughout the title, Willie’s practice is...

...built on a detailed knowledge of materials and develops precisely the kind of tactile, empirical connection that leads to smoothly working rhythms, appropriate power and torque, and the interpretations of sounds and the subtle physical sensations. Willie reads his body’s messages and measures out the appropriate force of a blow or a twist... bang things harder... then move gently, reading the pressure of the material (Harper, 1987, p. 118).

Yet, most important to note, is that the ability to use his hands, to gesture, to perform the repairs and craft in such a way is due to repetition. However, unlike the mechanistic process of the bricklayer (Section 4.4.1. and Section 5.3.1) the relation between the hands, the body and the material are defined by context and not simply ability.

It is from the writing of Bensman and Lilienfeld (cited in Harper) that the tactile knowledge of the craftsman becomes part of the exchange between the social condition (symbolic) and the body (movement). The repeated use of the hands, the development of tactile knowledge, results for them “habits of mind” (Bensman & Lilienfeld, 1991, p. xv), which become extensions of thought and manifest in an individual’s occupation, profession, or craft. Work and labour are a source of knowledge; however, they also query whether such habits define the relationship with the means of production. In other words, work for Bensman and Lilienfeld—which is an embodied, phenomenological activity—establishes the relationship to social class more so than preconceived social ideas. The way the hands are used and the method through which they move into a symbolic register defines a being-in-the-world. Importantly here, as much as the hands explore and provide knowledge of the world, the symbolic register of things such as social class also define the hands. The relationship is one of learning the world and being taught by it.

The central action to the development of this personal knowledge is ostensibly grasping. To grasp is not simply to hold, as is widely understood, but rather a complex prehensile posture that is made manifest between the relationship of the palm, pads, and fingers of the hand. As Streeck describes it, grasping is a “constellation of two or three *virtual fingers*: every [prehensile] posture is a configuration of two or three

force vectors... acting as a single unit” (Streeck, 2009, p. 49). Virtual fingers refer to a complex relationship between the facets of the hand (palm, pads, fingers, and thumb) and the forces they create on an object. A virtual finger creates an oppositional space that allows for grasping. Extensive work on virtual fingers and oppositional forces has been explored in-depth and illustrates the complex articulation of the various components in hand (see Arbib et al., 1985; Iberall et al., 1986; MacKenzie & Iberall, 1994) but what is most important to take from the ability to grasp is com-prehension: that is, the capacity provided by the hand to know the world.

Com-prehension is a gestural act of the hand through which the phenomena of the perceptual horizons of the subject are encountered through grasping. The expanded term has etymological roots in the Latin *com-* meaning together and *prehendere-* to grasp, or to have in hand. As Streeck writes:

Grasping exemplifies what is meant by “embodied knowledge”: underlying our routine abilities to grasp, hold, reorient, and transport objects is a wealth of knowledge not only about objects and the prehensile postures that suit them but also of the mechanics of tasks in which objects are handled... Grasping is a sophisticated, knowledge-based activity. (2009, p. 51)

The virtual fingers in comprehension are not force-vectors upon which an object rests, but instead, they are agents of active touch as well. To have something grasped in hand commits to an intentional act of incarnate consciousness and the held object becomes an extension of the perceptual horizon of the body.

The hand is an implicit part of the selfie-taking process. However, it should be noticed that the hand is not connecting with a pre-existing interface here; in the case of the selfie, the hand is part of the interface that comes into being and therefore, the embodied epistemology of the subject manifest within this moment of perception. However, a vital aspect of this conception of the hand is faced with difficulty when the question arises of individuals without hands or those with limited mobility and prehensibility of the *manus* (through forms of congenital amputation, symbrachydactyly or phocomelia, for example). To equate the hand as being a central zenith of embodied perception would prejudice against those without hands. However, through the concept of the virtual finger and an expanded understanding of the body through Merleau-Ponty’s research, this prehensibility is by no means exclusive to the hand but

rather an action of the entire individual. A series of short videos featured individuals born without hands, namely Gabe Adams and Donavia Walker (Barcroft TV, 2018a; Barcroft TV, 2018b). Within both videos, it is evidenced how prehensile action becomes manifest through other hinges of the body. For example, jaw and shoulder used to hold a spoon, or toes and feet used to accomplish a variety of tasks from writing to preparing a sandwich: all servicing the role of the virtual fingers. Whether these virtual fingers demonstrate the complete comprehension of the hand is a question beyond the scope of this research, but it illustrates that the hand can manifest in various places on the body. In short, it is not simply the fingers, wrist, and palm but any corner of prehensibility. This is important to note as both Adams and Walker are shown in their videos taking selfies. Adams places the phone on a couch with a timer (while looking into the digital mirror), while Walker uses her feet to take the photo and edit the image. Evidently, to say the selfie is held in hand requires expanding, and the image created through this comprehension is not simply an act of holding the device but an extended, embodied activity. In this regard, both hand and virtual finger should instead be understood not as physical determinists but metaphorical instances of the interminable extensity of the perceptual.

The perceptual horizon of the prehensile virtual fingers has led some commentators to describe how a device develops a fit within the hand of the user. Writing in 2004, Heidi Rae Cooley describes how the mobile screenic device (MSD) results in a new way of seeing developed between the hand and the eye (Cooley, 2004, p. 135). The research describes how “the term fit ... account[s] for the particular relationship between a hand and a MSD, which opens onto a relation of interface through which vision becomes and remains tactile” (Cooley, 2004, p. 137). The work problematises existing consensuses on the hand and its role in encountering technology. Cooley argues that the hand has historically been relegated to little more than an activator: the “hand merely initiates a process that proceeds and concludes in the device; technology dominates the transaction” (Cooley, 2004, p. 139). Ultimately, though, the role of the hand in the encounter with technology (or, more crucially, an apparatus) needs to be rearticulated.

The first step in the re-articulation of this encounter is an acknowledgement of all media being understood as mixed media. The concept of mixed media was introduced by Mitchell (2005) as a

response to a predominating discourse on visual media. Mitchell argues that no media is exclusively visual as an experience of media always incorporates a series of sensory modalities. In other words, even those media that have traditionally been referred to as visual²⁵ are not such as “one can affirm that there are no ‘visual media’, that all media are mixed media, without losing the concept of medium specificity” (2005, p. 261). Consider this in response to the methodological difficulties experienced when attempting to define the selfie (Section 1.2). By reducing the selfie to an image, it, by implication, becomes a visual medium; however, while the mirror and the camera are often misrepresented as visual media (as shown extensively in the selfie literature reviewed in Section 2.3.1), they need to be rearticulated as mixed media if the relationship with the apparatus is to be fully articulated as gestural.

It is for this reason that the selfie can be understood as tactile as the device is always grasped, and this grasping is imperative to the novel selfie interface. Tactile media is examined at length within Wanda Strauven’s *Touchscreen Archaeology: Tracing Histories of Hands-On Media Practices* (2021). A key distinction between Mitchell’s mixed media and Strauven’s tactile media is that “the term ‘tactile’... refers to concrete acts of touching.... [and] would not use it in relation to an untouched painting or photograph, or an untouched film screen”. In terms of the selfie, touching occurs in various instances. There is the touch involved in the grasping of the device and the touch involved in the moment fingers—virtual or otherwise—which contact the screen itself. These two types of gesture could be distinguished between (see Strauven, pp. 28-29), but in terms of this thesis, both types are part and parcel of the same volume of relations created through gesture. Specifically in terms of this thesis, what is most key is how these gestures or touching become banal and everyday (Strauven 2021, p. 29; see also, Flusser 2014, pp. 118-134). The objective in this chapter is not to explore the implications of these banal gestures; instead, answer the question of how these gestures have become banal. The justification for this line of enquiry is through positing that the banal or everyday gestures are certainly invisible gestures and invisibility is a functor of the desubjectified subject: an invisibility held in a gesture.

²⁵ Mitchell provides the examples of television, film, photography, and painting (2005, p. 257).

One possible response to this line of enquiry can be found in returning to the inbetweenness of gesture mentioned above (in Section 4.3). In Kristeva's criticism of structural linguistics titled "Gesture: Practice or communication?" (1978), it is asserted that attempts to understand gesture through a specific notation (such as Birdwhistell and Kendon) bifurcates the symbolic and its movement resulting in an inevitable collapse beneath the "inevitable defects of structuralism" (1978, p. 267). The relationship between verbal language and gestural language becomes an irreducible one as the body speaks beyond the utterances of the speaking subject. For this, Kristeva defines gesture as an anaphora: an "opening, and extension—of the [symbolic] which is 'posterior' to it" (1978, p. 269). However, this reading does not resolve problems with gesture in relation to the apparatus as while the anaphoric possibilities of gesture keep it relational—and therefore banal and invisible—they are always in relation to an apparatus (in the case of Kristeva's essay, the apparatus of language).

Flusser's work on gesture offers a considerably radical approach in understanding how gesture becomes a means through which a subject can act themselves out as a desubjectified subject. Gesture is presented as "a movement of the body or of a tool attached with the body, for which there is no satisfactory causal explanation [emphasis added]" (2014, p. 3). The lack of causal explanation as part of the definition is the most critical aspect of this explication. The lack of causal explanation is a result of invisibility insofar as anything without cause is axiomatic. For this reason, the apparatus invites our tactile gestures because this is how these things work (Agamben's correct means of use). But this does not explain how touching a screen became so commonplace that it almost resists interpretation. As Strauven writes, this has resulted in a profound change in our screen culture as the "touchscreen is becoming the default technology for screens and that we need a new term to indicate the non-touchscreen or non-touchable screen which is, obviously, not necessarily obsolete" (2021, p. 13).

However, in his research, Flusser does not discuss touchscreens, but he produces a framework for anticipating gesture to understand this change. Through Flusser, this framework can demonstrate that it was not a change in gestures that made gestures invisible, but rather a difference in how gestures are perceived and discussed. There is a veritable change in the relationship between gesture and the individual because gesture operates in a perceptual volume of relations that circles and delineates the

very apparatus that dictates their subjecthood. The following sections of the chapter will show this. It will begin with an extended discussion of Flusser's framework and show how gestures became desubjectified through two case studies.

5.3 Flusser's non-causal examination of gesture and limitations of this framework in terms of the apparatus

Flusser's work on gesture is espoused in a collection of essays published just months before his death in 1991. The text is by no means a complete and unqualified thesis on the concept of gesture, but rather a parade of thoughts and ideas presented in Flusser's essayistic but idiosyncratic style. Furthermore, it also continues his penchant to dismiss the more meticulous conditions of academic and intellectual research; there are no references or direct citations. His work tends to engage with suspicions regarding certain concepts and—as he writes in the introductory note to his work on photography—attempts to “strengthen this suspicion ... in order to maintain its hypothetical quality, avoid[ing] quotations from earlier works on similar themes [and] there is no bibliography” (Flusser, 2000, p. 7). As a result of this the work's translator, Nancy Ann Roth, notes in the preface of the English edition that the volume does not completely explicate a final meaning of the term “gesture”, and rather the “essays tend to spiral in on the meaning of gesture from many different angles” (Roth, 2014a, p. x). To add further difficulties to this text, the gestures in question are all Flusser's own. It is less a collection of a general theory of gesture, and instead an almost autobiographical appraisal on his gestures (this is most obvious in his essay on the gesture of pipe-smoking where he deliberately spends the first paragraph detailing his tobacco pouches and pockets).

By situating gesture in such a profoundly autobiographical way, it, methodologically, allows for Flusser to explicitly return to the phenomena of gesture. This assortment of Flusserian qualities may, at first, appear to be a selection of proverbial red flags, however it is only through such a method that a rigorously phenomenological examination of gesture can emerge. The influence of phenomenology on Flusser's research is clear. He was certainly familiar with Husserl's work as the index of his travel library contains Petr Horák *Edmund Husserl: Život a dílo* (1991), Hermann Ulrich Asemisen's *Strukturanalytische Probleme der Wahrnehmung in der Phänomenologie Husserls* (1957) and Julio

Fragata's *Husserl e a fundamentacao das ciencias (separata do t. 7. das public. do 23. Congr. Luso-Espanol* (1957) (as provided by the Flusser Archive). However, although no explicit commentaries were immediately found on the relationship between Flusser and Merleau-Ponty the influence and impetus of the perceptual body certainly permeates Flusser's thinking within this volume.

The explicitly autobiographical examination of gesture underscores how gesturality cannot be framed in a way that is disjointed from the subject and the context from where it unfolds. Roth extrapolates upon this in her essay, "Towards a phenomenology of gestures" (2015), and extends how the "quirky, banal, perhaps not entirely deliberate features of an individual's behaviour are worth serious consideration" (Roth, 2015, p. 68). Flusser's gesture-theory in this regard emerges as an examination of the relationship between situatedness and being seen; these less expressive movements (not the verb of pipe smoking, but the experience of storing tobacco in a pocket) all consolidate across a threshold through which an individual acts themselves out. Gesture provides an ipseity—meaning here selfhood—which is both revealed and produced through these movements.

Therefore, while Flusser does provide a possible theory of gesture in the appendix of the collection ("Towards a general theory of gesture"), what is more interesting is an examination of the text as a fragmented whole: that is to say, a theory in process that allows for an examination of gesture in process: less a consummate theory of gesture, and rather a heuristic from which this topic can be approached. For this reason, Flusser asserts that gesture is not to be understood in terms of its *causes*, and that gesture is instead a movement with no satisfactory causal explanation. As he writes:

If I raise my arm, and someone tells me that the movement is the result of physical, physiological, psychological, social, economic, cultural, and whatever other causes, I would accept his explanation. *But I would not be satisfied with it.* For I am sure that I raise my arm because I want to, and that despite all the indubitably real causes, I would *not raise it if I didn't want to.* This is why raising my arm is a gesture. Here, then, is the definition I suggest: "a gesture is a movement of the body or of a tool connected to the body for which *there is no satisfactory causal explanation.*" And I define satisfactory as that point in a discourse after *which any further discussion is superfluous* [emphases added]. (Flusser, 2014, pp. 1-2)

Gesture for Flusser has a certain point of agency as he explicitly introduces an intentional decision into the definition that distinguished his theory of gesture from prevailing theories of gesture and the

apparatus. It is gesture not because an individual can perform such a movement; it is a gesture as an individual can also decide not to. This moment is incredibly important to understand gesture (and by implication the selfie) as Flusser situates the moment of gesture not as the movement, but rather as that instance just bearing on the movement in which a decision is made. If a Flusserian conceptualisation of gesture is to be understood as an object, this object is the instance where a decision is made. The decision to move is that of the individual moving their arm and the experience of this moving can only be understood from the point of perception of a perceiving body.

Gesture, therefore, happens at the turn of experience. It is experiential, on the one hand, however it is also the decision made on the part of the individual to engage in this experience, on the other.

But there are two implicit problems fundamental to such a definition and conceptualisation that, in contrary to what Flusser writes, does require further discussion that is not superfluous. Firstly, a gesture does not exist in isolation of other gestures, and other individuals are able to witness those gestures (discussed at length throughout Chapter 4). What this means is that an individual's intent to step into the experience of a gesture also places others in a position to experience that same gesture expanding the volume of relations beyond intention alone. Just as Ruchatz so rightly argued in his discussion of the selfie scene: it is less the photo that is upsetting to most, but instead the witnessing of a movement within a certain situation that results in strong reactions. Second, Flusser does not effectively account for the tool attached to the body; when said tool is read as a metonym for an apparatus. Therefore, Flusser's definition requires expansion. Firstly, how is it possible to account for the impact of a gesture witnessed by others? Secondly, how is it possible to account for relationship between gesture and an apparatus after accounting for experience? It is in these two questions that the invisibility of gesture can be uncovered.

5.3.1 A Flusserian reading of gesture as a witnessed thing

The reading of the neighbourly misunderstanding (Section 4.3.1) is an exemplification of the results of gesture being witnessed by others. As it is defined here: the ability for gesture to be witnessed from an array of standpoints is why gesture is better understood as a volume of relations. Flusser discusses this

dimension of gesture being seen by several individuals in his essay on the gesture of photographing²⁶. He refers this to as a “situation” (2014, p. 74). As described:

The center of this situation is the man with the apparatus [the camera]. He is moving. Still, it’s awkward to say of a center that it is moving in relation to its own periphery. When a center moves, it does so with respect to the observer, and the whole situation then moves as well. We must therefore concede that what we are seeing when we watch the man with the apparatus is a movement of the whole situation, including the man sitting on his chair. It is difficult to admit this because we’re accustomed to believing that someone who is sitting is not moving. Because we believe it, we think we’re seeing it. (2014, pp. 74-73)

As he continues further in the chapter:

The man with the apparatus is a human being, which means that he is not only in the situation but also reflectively apart from it. We know that we are dealing with a human being, not only because we see a form we can identify as a human body. But equally and more characteristically, we know it because we see gestures that very clearly “indicate” not only attention directed toward the man on the chair but also a reflective distance from that attention. We recognize ourselves in this gesture because it is our own way of being in the world. We know that we are dealing with a human being because we recognize ourselves in him. Our identification of a human body is a secondary element of this direct and concrete recognition. If we trusted in this identification alone, we could be wrong. We could be seeing a cybernetic machine simulating human gestures. But we can’t be wrong about recognizing a gesture, just because recognizing ourselves in it is a human gesture. (2014, p. 77)

What these quotations illustrate (and what is evidenced through Champion’s vignette) is that gesture always operates within a volume of relations. What this means is that understanding a gesture is not a manner of recognising and perceiving an intended sign, but it is that ability of an individual to recognise themselves within a situation—a volume of relations—that both allows for its recognition, but also allows for the gesture to continue. Therefore, Flusser describes gesture not only as a speech-act, but instead as an articulation and expression of the movements between various individuals and not the movements themselves. But what is of critical importance to acknowledge is not only that the gestures are recognised, but that in this recognition “we know that we are dealing with a human being, not only because we see a form we can identify as a human body [b]ut equally and more characteristically, we know it because we see gestures that very clearly ‘indicate’ not only attention directed toward the man

²⁶ Not to be confused with his essay “The gesture of photography” in *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (2000)

on the chair but also a reflective distance from that attention” (2014, p. 77). There is a recognition of a humanity in response to these gestures.

Crucial to note here is that this topological situation does not only occur in company of others and can also occur alone. Flusser examines this in both his discussion on the gesture of smoking a pipe and in his work on the gesture of shaving where he mentions—*apropos*—the mirror. It is important to note that the volume of relations within which gesture attempts to articulate itself does not necessitate multiple individuals. Flusser writes:

...we must let the gesture itself speak. Only then can we do away with ideological prejudices of the type ‘I have a body’ or ‘I am a body.’ Because the gesture is directed toward the gesticulator... because in it, [they are] both agent and object, both the one who performs it and who suffers it, it offers an unusual, and in fact not a dialectical experience. One feels how the hand guides the apparatus over the skin and how the skin is scraped by the apparatus... (2014, p. 107)

The volume of relations that emerge from gesture and its simultaneous ability to be perceived by others is shown here to occur without company, or in company of an apparatus exclusively. Put otherwise, while this witnessing is certainly done by people, the apparatus is a witness as well.

Consider this in relation to the gesture of the selfie, or more specifically the interfacing with the novel selfie interface. The volume of relations is situated between various lines that intersect across one another: the ability to look into the screen, to witness an individual on screen who is in turn witnessing an individual on screen: resolved through the hand grasping the device. The image captured of the selfie can never be anything but an image of an individual taking a selfie for this very reason, and this is how this volume of relations is perpetuated. This moment within the gesture of the selfie is not the complete volume as multiple photographs can be captured, and multiple poses can be struck.

While this is easy to consider in terms of things seen, perception is more than seeing. What does the hand witness within this gestural volume? To leave the role of the hand as witness unaccounted for within the taking of the selfie would reduce it to nothing more than the appendage that merely initiates the process. It would ignore the fit and tactile vision made available through Streek (2009, p. 56) and Cooley (2004, p. 139). However, the role of the hand as witness here is not generative, rather it is—

through its invisibility—a false witness as it resolves the perceptual break organising the individual. As a result of this, the gesturing individual appears to be human. The role of the hand in the gesture of the selfie, through its prehensile ability to comprehend, through its embodied knowledge developed through grasping, is to establish the selfie taker as a human. Dangerously, however, as the definition of human here is a conditional definition: a human is one that can take a selfie correctly: a human as per correct use of the apparatus.

5.3.2 Revisiting gesture and apparatus through Flusser

A description of the Flusserian apparatus was presented in the Chapter 3. That is, an arrangement of programs and codes arranged as a black box (2000, p. 16). However, in terms of gesture, it is worth considering two more specific aspects of this definition. First, consider how Flusser makes use of an epistemological account of the word apparatus. He writes:

The Latin word apparatus is derived from the verb *apparare* meaning ‘to prepare’. Alongside this there exists in Latin the verb *praeparare*, likewise meaning ‘to prepare’. To illustrate in English the difference between the prefixes ‘ad’ and ‘prae’, one could perhaps translate *apparare* with ‘pro-pare’, using ‘pro’ in the sense of ‘for’. Accordingly, an ‘apparatus’ would be a thing that lies in wait or in readiness for something, and a ‘preparatus’ would be a thing that waits patiently for something. (2000, p. 21)

This expansion to the definition of apparatus could be read in terms of codes and programs (knowledges of use, for instance), as the use of the apparatus is prepared through how the subject is programmed to use it. Flusser’s reading of the apparatus is explicitly phenomenological and this is ostensibly what separates it from others (such as Foucault and Agamben). As presented by Finger et al. (2001, p. 75), Flusser’s idea of a code is “concretely phenomenological, that is, material, and we see here, too, commonalities with, and translations of, a cultural studies-oriented material history or material studies”. However, the word material is better read in terms of embodied knowledge as the codes and programs of use (of the apparatus) are not exclusively exterior to the individual, but sometimes embodied within a gestural practice.

This can be evidenced by returning to the figure of the bricklayer discussed in Section 4.4.1. The bricklayer as a figure of labour is certainly entrenched within a series of codes and programs (much like Schneider at his desk with his tools), and repetitive concrete movements “become an automatic part of physical life” (Lecoq 2000, p. 22) and the possibility of knowledge—the weight and volume—of the world encountered is made invisible through repetition. Mime artists believed that active engagement of a body within society would lead to “rediscovering a thing with a renewed freshness” (2000, p. 22). Lecoq continues and builds upon this example and begins to rearticulate the importance of mime and its presence in all artistic and creative endeavours. It is in this extended section that gestures relations to programs emerge:

There is another form of hidden mime, which can be found in all the arts. Every true artist is a mime. Picasso’s ability to draw a bull depended on his having found the essential Bull in himself, which *released the shaping gesture of his hand* [emphasis added]. He was miming. Painters and sculptors are outstanding mime artists because they share in the same act of embodiment. There is a submerged form of mime which gives rise to different creative acts in all the arts. This is why I could move from teaching theatre to teaching architecture, and how I invented ‘architect-mimes’. They mime existing spaces in order to know them better, then they mime what they will build, in order that their buildings will come to life. (Lecoq, 2000, p. 23)

Here the project of corporeal mime taken to its conclusion: for an individual to find an essential idea in themselves and release these ideas through the body, through the hands. Flusser echoes this sentiment in his collection where he discusses the “state of mind” (2014, pp. 5-7) expressed via gesture. He defines state of mind as the thing that is expressed and articulated through movements of the body. It is possible to understand this state of mind as affect, however, this does not add much clarity as little is done to conceptualise this term either (2014, pp. 4-5).²⁷ However, what is important to take note of is that the relationship developed as an interface becomes embodied through a repetition of a movements and this embodiment is explicitly a form or category of knowledge (*connaissance*, as discussed in terms of Foucault in Chapter 3). The hands—the virtual fingers, rather—are prepared through this embodied

²⁷ Although it is worth noting that in Flusser’s original essay he uses the German word *Stimmung* which exhibits a broad range of meanings “including ‘mood,’ ‘emotion,’ and ‘subjective view’; ‘states of mind’” (Roth, 2014b, p. 178). When writing in English, Flusser would use the term sentimentality as an equivalent but affect became more suitable as it denotes “the conscious aspect of an emotion considered apart from bodily changes; *also*; a set of observable manifestations” (Merriam Webster, s.v. “affect” cited in Roth, 2014b, p. 178). Affect as a term has also fallen under considerable critical scrutiny since what Patricia Clough called the “affective turn” (see Clough, 2008), however for the purposes of this research affect can be understood as being crucial to Flusser’s theory of gesture as it “unites the sense of an internal experience with its external, observable manifestations” (Roth, 2014b, p. 178). Affect is returned to in considerable detail in Chapter 6.

knowledge for the apparatus. There is a gestural coding or gestural programming that occurs in relation to the device. The knowledge of the apparatus, ultimately, is not then a result of repressive dominant power strategies or hegemonic capacities: but rather perpetuated through how the hands grapple with these codes and not the device alone.

This requires that the concept of desubjectification is revisited. The process of desubjectification can make the body (to quote Agamben again) “docile, yet free, bodies that assume their identity and their ‘freedom’ as subjects” (Agamben, 2009, pp. 19-20), however the ability to express freedom through the apparatus is not exclusively in the purview of the creation of the image, or the creation of an image of the body in terms of the selfie; the ability to believe in this freedom is granted at the level of phenomena as this phenomenon is embodied through the gestural, repeated knowledge of the body. In this regard, Agamben refers to gesture as the “communication of communicability” (2000, p. 58). It is in this moment that the subject and the object distinction between an individual and an apparatus completely collapses as the embodied knowledge of the grasping hand promotes an invisibility. It is an invisibility, which unfolds at the level of experience. Gesture, ultimately, becomes a means of experiencing the invisible.

Flusser’s work on gesture, expanded here through the volume of perceptual relations and the ability to embody knowledge in the hands, offers a complex organisation of how an apparatus defines a subject, and how the individual experiences this relationship. Therefore, ultimately to say that the selfie is gestural is to examine how the body develops an experience of the interface that is at once docile while attending to the mechanics of the apparatus therefore creating an impression of freedom. To evidence this more explicitly, two case studies are required. Each case is not a separate instance that concretely evidences the claims made, rather the cases can be understood as two points through which a line can be drawn. The first being when gesture was made invisible (the launch of the iPhone case), the second being when these gestures were recognised as human (the scrolling chimpanzee).

5.4 Case 1: The iPhone and the rhetoric surrounding invisible gestures

Cooley's research into fit was prescient, and this is seen in relation to the launch of the first iPhone that occurred just three years after the publication of the original article. What is most important to note is how the presentation of a relationship between the hands and the device is discussed in the meticulous and discriminating rhetoric of presenter and Apple founder, Steve Jobs. As much as the iPhone is being discussed here, it is not particularly the specific brand, make, or model of phone that is of concern. Instead, what is of value is how this specific form factor affected gesture and how the gesture of the body implicated this form factor. Today this form factor is ubiquitous when it comes to mobile device design and seen in a variety of flagship smartphone models. Also, it would be presumptuous to assume that the iPhone was the first of this type; however, it was certainly the instance when this form factor fully realised the hand and its capabilities leading to a deluge of similar devices. If the digital revolution was over—as Nicolas Negroponte asserted in 1998—a gestural revolution can be traced to this moment some ten years later.

Consider the event in terms of its discourses; not only the discourses perpetuated by Jobs, but the discourse of the hands: seen in how the phone is grasped (comprehended) and how this compares to other devices also held during the presentation. The hand plays a central role and Jobs is quick to announce that with the iPhone, Apple had “designed something wonderful for your hand... [which] fits beautifully in the palm of your hand” (Jobs, 2007). A central and repeated message underpinning the introduction of the iPhone was how seamlessly the device became part of the individual who holds it: a case study of the fit Cooley spoke of. Jobs manages to subtly reinforce this to his audience by often showing the iPhone held within a—noticeably White—hand (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1

“Something wonderful for your hand”

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Note. Unlike a touchscreen that calls to be touched, this device is designed to fit in the hand. It calls to be grasped (screengrab from Jobs, 2007).

Jobs begins the presentation stating that he wanted to introduce three revolutionary products: a “widescreen iPod with touch controls, a revolutionary mobile phone, and a breakthrough internet communicator” (Jobs, 2007). The phrase is repeated as a graphic on the large screen behind him rotates phenakistoscopically allowing them all to merge into the single machine: the iPhone. It is imperative to note that this new machine is not either of those things, but rather a collection of those various components. However, with the introduction of the prehensile hand—the gesturing appendage—this collection becomes organised: not an image on the large screen behind the presenter but situated in Jobs’s hand as seen in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2

Jobs reveals the iPhone form factor not on screen but held in his hand.

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Note. The device is revealed and contrasted to a mock-up of older phone form factors such as those seen on the screen (screengrab from Jobs, 2007).

It is a literal com-prehension (as defined in Section 5.2). The coming together of various digital devices that become a single device not in and of itself, but in the hand. The iPhone called to be gestured with, played with. When Jobs begins to illustrate the capabilities of the device the presentation is filmed with two cameras. The one camera displayed the content produced by the screen of the phone, while the another displayed a close angle of Jobs's hands executing a wide variety of practiced, gestural movements: swiping, pinching, scrolling (Figure 5.3). Within the oppositional space created between the virtual fingers of the index finger and palm sits the device: a large touchscreen interpellating the perceiving, active touch of the hand. It was the type of setup that invited people to touch the screen (cf. Strauven 2021, p. 11).

Figure 5.3

The hand and its content.

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Note. Using two screens to demonstrate how the device is called to be played with and touched (screengrab from Jobs, 2007).

Jobs expands his rhetoric of touch into a further synaesthetic dimension. The term synaesthetic is adopted from the research of Sobchack and her work on perception and cinema (1992, pp. 76-79). If perception is defined as synaesthetic, it means that sense is never discrete (sight, hearing, *etc.*). All perception is synaesthetic as “our senses are modalities of perception and, as such, are co-operative and commutable” (1992, p. 76). As Jobs says: with these gestures you “can touch your music... you can just touch your music... it’s so cool” (Jobs, 2007).

The iPhone is not the only device seen during the presentation and Jobs demonstrates the distance between this new form factor, its gestural capabilities, and previous mobile phone forms in a variety of ways. The most notable of these is during the first public phone call made with the iPhone. During the presentation, Jobs uses the device to make a phone call to then senior vice president of design at Apple, Jony Ive. The two individuals are auspiciously set to represent Jobs’s proposed touch revolution. Jobs is on stage, lording above the audience while Ive is in the audience below with the then standard flip-phone. At no point does Jobs hold the iPhone to his ear in a traditional phone call gesture, it is always held before him. If the phone is to be held, it should be used as a (hand)held device and the role of the

hand in using the phone is no longer simply a scaffold to set the phone against the ear of the individual: the hand is an active part of the process. Even the standard haptic practice of dialling numbers is presented as antiquated by Jobs refereeing to dialling the phone as being “real last century” (2007).

It appears removing the plastic keyboards of the smartphones was a central aspect of the design of this form factor. Once again, the sovereignty of the human hand emerges in the discourse of the presentation. The launch of the iPhone in many ways manages to overcome a persistent difficulty in user interface and user experience of computer use. To encounter the *digital* of the computer an individual is wholly reliant on an input device of some capacity. The trajectory of these technologies is a long one, with the hand being the logical conclusion. While keyboards were the initial port of call during the early life of home computing, the rise of a less text-based, and more visual graphical user interfaces gave way to the mouse as a pointing device. These peripherals were both argued to be limitations to how an individual used a computer. Negroponte wished to remove these peripherals and described them as a series of steps in input between the user and their digital interface. As he says:

First of all, you've got to find the mouse. You have to probably stop. Maybe not come to a grinding halt, but you've got to sort of find that mouse. Then you find the mouse, and you're going to have to wiggle it a little bit to see where the cursor is on the screen. And then when you finally see where it is, then you've got to move it to get the cursor over there, and then—“Bang”—you've got to hit a button or do whatever. That's four separate steps versus typing and then touching and typing and just doing it all in one motion—or one-and-a-half, depending on how you want to count. (Negroponte, 2008)

However, by moving to touch input, you have more direct access to the object before you. Yet this direct access is less important than Negroponte's point that “the one advantage is that you don't have to pick [fingers] up, and people don't realize how important that is—not having to pick up your fingers to use them” (Negroponte, 2008). They are by implication embodied. One peripheral Jobs draws attention to in his presentation is the stylus. However, Jobs is recorded as having a complete disdain for the stylus and is once quoted as saying: “God gave us ten styluses... [let's] not invent another” (Isaacson, 2011, p. 661). During the launch of the iPhone, he sees the lack of stylus as a triumph and makes a point of mentioning it to the crowd. As he says:

[We have a] giant screen: but how are we going to communicate to this? We don't want to carry around a mouse. So what are we going to do? Oh a stylus, right, we're going to use a stylus? No! Who wants a stylus? You have to get them and put them away. You lose them. Yuck! Nobody wants a stylus. We're going to use the best pointing device in the world. We're going to use a pointing device we're all born with. We're born with ten of them. We're going to use our fingers. (Jobs, 2007)

The finger (as in Negroponte's predictions) is rhetorically referred to as a pointing device, not a virtual finger that allows for grasping.

When examining Jobs interact with the iPhone, his use of his index finger appears awkward and, in some ways, ungainly. There is often an important distinction made between the index finger and the thumb. The rise of the mobile phone (before the iPhone) was often predicated by thumb input because of the physical keyboard that Jobs was so determined to get rid of. This did result in some close examination of the thumb in relation to mobile devices. In Japan, a generational group of mobile phone users (*keitai denwa*) became referred to as the *oyayubi-zoku* which translates to thumb-tribe or thumb-family (Foster, 2011, p. 65). As Foster writes, "according to some observers [thumbs] also transfigure practices such as pointing and ringing doorbells" (2011, p. 65). Such behaviour emerged in the rest of the world and this thumb culture (Glutz et al., 2005) became central to cellphone behaviour. The thumb became a central figure of mobile digital culture, and it was later emphasised through social network site Facebook that used the image of thumb as a like and dislike (thumbs-up or thumbs-down), but also the appendage used to navigate the Facebook feed.

There is a distinction between the index finger and the thumb that is seemingly worth noting and Wolf-Dieter Ernst discusses this when researching the work of body artist ORLAN. He writes that the thumb "and index fingers, of course, carry strong connotations. The index finger carries intention: with it, we transfer this intention to the world. With the thumb, we perform one of the most simple choices in digital communication: *I like* or *I don't like*" (Ernst, 2019, p. 100). Philosopher Michel Serres argued that this has resulted in a novel form of human that "no longer have the same body or the same behaviour" (2012, p. 3). He refers to these new people as thumbelinas (*petite poucette*) with the touching and tapping thumb being the metonymic signifier of their entire person.

However, such a taxonomy of discrete digits collapses when the concept of grasping emerges. While Jobs wrote the hagiography of the index finger in this presentation, the grasping prehensile posture of the hand allowed for both thumb and index finger to become indexical. The thumb as an opposable digit scrolls and taps and also works in accordance with the index finger to pinch and swipe. Ultimately, with the introduction of this new form factor it becomes increasingly tenuous to divide the roles of the various digits and instead consider the grasping hand as a complete unit. The function forwarded by the iPhone here is not to hold and point, but to grasp.

And this is all in effort of invisibility. The attempt at seamless integration of device, media, gestures all drove forward an invisibility implicit within these movements and the rhetoric espoused by Jobs and his hands attempted to communicate this through his discussions of ease of use and seamless integration. These gestures are “easy”—naturally—and do not need any learning or teaching. For this apparatus (the mobile device) to become organised it would need to at once be in complete contiguity of the body while simultaneously being separate to allow for input or touch: at once a McLuhanian extension of the self (2013, p. 13) and Harawayian cybernetic implant of the body (1991, p. 149). The iPhone is an attempt to straddle these two points simultaneously. For this, the only possible method of connection is through the body at the *telos* of the hand. This, ultimately, is why grasping and the active activities of the virtual fingers become not only an act of holding but an act of gesturing as they manifested the perceptual inbetweenness of the movement of the body and the symbolic. It was the creation of a series of a volume of new and invisible gestural relations. Gestures, therefore, are no longer modes of interaction but statements of perceptual digital enunciation (*énoncé*).

Therefore, gesture can be understood as discursive (as defined in an explicitly Foucauldian sense in Section 3.1.1). Again, not a discourse as a mode of talking, but a discourse as a way in which certain knowledges have the capacity to be said (made visible) and unsaid (made invisible). What is made visible and invisible in this instance at the level of gesture are as follows:

1. First, the device is made visible through the production of an apparatus (the iPhone-apparatus) in which knowledges of digital capacities and potentials are determined by a perceptual discourse of the hand. The interface (not the device, but the way the device was held) is fettered

through an assumed neutrality and made visible as it was grasped in the perceiving hand. An individual understands the phone to be there as the phone is held and therefore it is something exterior to them.

2. Second, the device is made invisible. Within the organisation of this apparatus the various digital components, the network, the potential of the hand (as natural and imbued by God, as per Jobs) and their desired relations are made natural as they are property of the hand. There are no steps involved in this perception and therefore the perception can be articulated as being natural: invisible
3. Thirdly, the two vectors of visibility and invisibility coincided in a moment of *postdigital* significance. The digital is now everywhere (firstly), and an individual has no choice but to (quite literally) hold on (secondly).

And this relationship between the visible and the invisible resulted in the selfie, if indirectly and not immediately. The first iPhone did not have an FFC, and this was only included into this form factor—already comfortable in the hand—three years later in 2010. While this organisation had occurred through other similar devices (discussed in Section 2.3.1) this moment is when all those constituent parts aligned (the mirror, the gesture, the interface). This digital representation of an individual did not irrupt because photos could be taken, it evidently irrupted because the digital component was so enmeshed into the hand that the camera no longer needed to be considered. The selfie became “natural” because these gestures—in their invisibility—had become natural.

The White hand (Figure 5.1) is important to note. A computer is never neutral insofar as how this apparatus is assembled is predicated on the society, community, or organisation that arranges it. Such an assertion is axiomatic and there is a deluge of evidence to evidence this. For example, in reference to the internet, specifically, the work of Lisa Nakamura is fundamental and provides evidence of how vectors and prejudices of race have moved online as “our ideas about race, ethnicity, and identity continue to be shaped and reshaped every time we log on, even if we’ve just entered the post-Internet ‘epoch’” (2002, p. xi). The research presented by Nakamura is principally centred around how ideas of race are perpetuated through how visual artefacts are presented online, and how these visual artefacts are responded to (see Nakamura 2002, pp. 61-86; 2009, pp. 37-69). What is principle here is how the internet—as a site—reproduces racial codes and programmes (to borrow Flusser’s words).

However, in the work of Ruha Benjamin (also writing on the topic of race), the lack of neutrality of digital technologies such as the internet is not only predicated on how it is used but a result of how it was developed. Benjamin discusses this in terms of what she describes as an engineered inequality:

[Technology] designed in a world drenched in racism, will find it nearly impossible to stay dry. To a certain extent, [it learns] to speak the coded language of their human parents—not only programmers but all of us online who contribute to “naturally” occurring datasets on which AI learn. Just like diverse programmers, Black and Latinx police officers are known to engage in racial profiling alongside their white colleagues, though they are also target of harassment in a way their White counterparts are not. One’s individual racial identity offers no surefire insulation from the prevailing ideologies. There is no need to identify ‘giggling programmers’ self-consciously seeking to discriminate one particular group as evidence of discriminatory design. Instead, so much of what is routine, reasonable, intuitive, and codified reproduces unjust social arrangements, without every burning a cross to shine light on the problem. (2019, p. 62)

Benjamin’s work is an invaluable resource for a plethora of examples of this. However, what is most key to note is how these mechanisms do not lose their political neutrality only because they are developed from a particularly neutral perspective. Even digital technologies such as machine learning are constituted from existing datasets “rife with racial (and economic and gendered) biases, the raw data that robots use to learn and make decisions about the world reflect deeply ingrained cultural prejudices and structural hierarchies” (2019, p. 59). The White hand in Figure 5.1 is not incidental, and its implications speak volumes in terms of the rhetoric of the “God-given” invisibility perpetuated by jobs, and how these gestures were determined in terms of their humanness later.²⁸

The relationship between the hand and the device is both an experiential and perceptual one and the above work on phenomenology illustrates how the perceptual horizons of the body complicate expected understandings of the gesture and the apparatus. What is most important here in context of this research is the role the hand played in creating what is an additional image within the selfie-taking process. Or rather, an additional line of perception in how the relationship is developed through the

28 Nakamura and Benjamin are both writing of the United States of America in their work, however other research can be demonstrated in other countries. Notably, for example, Nanjala Nyabola discusses the lack of political neutrality of the digital within Kenya in *Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics* where it is concluded that while the internet has “amplified voices that would otherwise be unheard... digital spaces have also allowed the state to reach deeper into the private lives of citizens” (2018, p. 213).

interface. This revelation of the role of the hand in the interface at the level of perception means that questions of image require revisiting. Instead of arguing what type of categories of image are created through the novel selfie interface, it would be more valuable to ask a question *of organisation*. Between the look into the camera, the reflection of the mirror, and the prehensile fit of the held machine, an array of perceptual images are organised and arranged, and it is in this arranging that any image of the body is made manifest. This organising is the inbetweenness alluded to above: it is not the auspice of the apparatus that is controlling and regimenting gesture and it is not the types of images that are developed through the interface. It is the relationship between.

It is the hand that is responsible for overcoming the perceptual breaks discussed in Section 3.5. The invisibility of the mirror or resolution of the perceptual breaks cannot be resolved optically as would be expected in a specular mirror, and therefore the difficulty of the eyes in this moment to meet themselves is supplemented by the knowing, grasping hand. Eye-contact becomes supplanted by hand-contact (grasping) and therefore the novel selfie interface becomes embodied through the tactile, knowing virtual fingers. In other words, while this looking into the mirror does produce a displacement between an individual and their (non)reflection, it is the grasping of the hand that organises this break between these two discontinuous orders of perception. It is this organisation, ultimately, that can be understood as a gesture.

5.5 Case 2: The humanity of the swiping chimpanzee

A video was posted onto Instagram (ostensibly the home of the selfie) on the 21st of April in 2019 by Mike Holston, who goes by @TheRealTarzann (Holston, 2019). The video depicted a chimpanzee leisurely using a smartphone as illustrated by the screengrabs in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3

A chimpanzee gesturing with the mobile device.

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Note. Holsten, 2009, https://www.instagram.com/p/Bwf080_Bfby/

The ape was mimicking a learned way of gesturing with a phone. It was scrolling, swiping, and double tapping in a way that was at once both abject and eerily familiar. The use of the word abject here is as defined by Kristeva as a “jettisoned object [that is] radically excluded and draws me in” (1982, p. 2).

The otherness of the chimpanzee and the familiarity of the gesture would be (using Kristeva’s framework) inconsolable but still acknowledged and therefore left in a place of tension. It is this tension that can be referred to as abject.

The video gained popularity and became something of an internet meme which resulted in strong reactions. A cascade of think-pieces irrupted online from a variety of different angles. CNN reported that it was scrolling “*like a human* [emphasis added]” (CNN, 2019) and content mills such as BuzzFeed ordered their audiences to “stop what [they] are doing immediately to go and look at the video” as “the chimps [*sic*] scroll game is A+ and it is already a better scroller than most of the humans [they] know” (Mezrahi, 2019). What is most important to note about the discourse surrounding this video—and the litany of responses—is that it illustrates in a very tangible way how the gestural relationship with mobile devices had changed: they are no longer objects out there, but instead they have emerged in the last decade as things actively touched and gestured with in a specific, haptic, or tactile way (as demonstrated in Streek, Cooley and Strauven’s research).

Within context of the chimpanzee and the response to the video the word “human” was used as a motif throughout the responses. The chimpanzee—a species which is defined as the closest genetic relative of the human being (Lonsdorf, 2010, p. 348)—was said to become human when it was shown touching and scrolling this screen. What was being pervaded within the discourse is simple: to touch a screen is *human*. This is a bit peculiar. The current gestural relationships with screens exemplified in the movements of the chimpanzee—specifically mobile phone screens—has only emerged in the past decade or so. The top-to-toe reshaping of individuals through their gestures and behaviours first mentioned by Agamben has spread itself through the widespread adoption of this mobile phone form factor. The heritage of the touchscreen predates this (see Strauven, 2012 for a comprehensive archaeology) but this collection of gestures (scrolling, swiping, tapping) is relatively new. Yet, somehow, this behaviour in the chimpanzee was recognised as human.

What the chimpanzee was doing was a series of recognisable movements: but the act was not gestural as it did not express or articulate meaning—at least not meaning accessible to non-chimpanzees. However, a selection of movements is recognised, and lines are drawn between the chimpanzee, those witnessing its movements, the desire to film those movements (the gesture of filming), the sharing of those movements and then the incessant conversation surrounding those movements (as discussed and repeated through the various news articles cited above), and the discussion within social media; lines that all converged as discourse around a body of knowledge that can be called gesture.²⁹ In context of the chimpanzee—do chimpanzee’s scroll?—the question is not concerned with whether or not the chimpanzee is scrolling, what is far more interesting is how quickly the transition is made from recognising the scrolling to declaring the scrolling to be a human gesture.

This scroll could be considered phatic in this regard, however in a way not noted before. Frosh does call the selfie phatic in how it interpellates (as in an Althusserian “hailing” of the subject, 1971, pp. 170-177) individuals who see these images, and Ruchatz implies the selfie is phatic in how it is recognised.

²⁹ Consider what is occurring here in terms of the work of British anthropologist Mary Douglas and her work on body symbolism and the Maussian programme (in reference to Marcel Mauss. American anthropologist Gordon Hewes was a significant actor in the popularity of Mauss’s influential work and described the Maussian programme upon which empirical evidence should be collected (research Hewes conducted, himself)). In particular, consider her essay “Do dogs laugh? A cross-cultural approach to body symbolism” (1978).

However, the phatic nature within the gestures of the chimpanzee is ostensibly three-fold. Firstly, the movement is seen (evidenced in how quickly it was filmed). Secondly, the movement is recognised as a gesture and described as such. Thirdly, this gesture is then posited as being human from almost the opposite direction as there is no direct line between the movement and humanness. These three stages occur quickly, and this rapid pace is possibly what led to the virality of the clip, but in its rapidity it interpellates those who see it. However, this interpellation is by no means an interpellation into ideology, but instead an interpellation into gesture (as gesture is both recognised as a sign and understood as a perceptual movement examined throughout Chapter 4). The functioning of the category of the subject (see Althusser, 1971, p. 173), here, is a gestural functioning.

While this ability to recognise the gestures could first be relegated to nothing more than a signifying process, the situation of the body within this process is what makes it more. Once again, not a body in the corporeal sense of biomechanical weights and levels, but this body as a perceptive incarnate consciousness. The acknowledging of the chimpanzee's movements as human and that abject schism experienced is completed by the body of those who see it. It is this that situates an individual within the volume of relations that are occurring: not only the gesture of scrolling but the potential for an individual to scroll.

The experience here is not only of the actor moving—the chimpanzee—but also witnessing the chimpanzee move. It is therefore not only the chimpanzee who experiences a desubjectification (if that is at all possible), but also those who recognise those movements. This desubjectification can plausibly be understood as not an existential position, but rather a paradigmatic one. The scroll of the chimpanzee is recognised in how it reveals a paradigm of gesturality within which those who recognise it recognise themselves. Flusser uses the example of the Baroque period to examine this (2014, pp. 171-172). He does not do so to illustrate baroque gestures, but rather to illustrate how historically compartmentalised portions of history—paradigms—are expressed through gesture. Within the baroque period there emerged baroque gestures—and the same could be said throughout history however it is to be organised. These periods are only made manifest in the embodied experience of the possible volumes of the body that emerge within those periods. Flusser writes that a “baroque gesture can occur

at any time... [yet] the baroque gesture is an expression of being-in-the-world that may occur anywhere, at any time, but that predominated in Europe of the Seventeenth century” (Flusser, 2014, p. 172).

What this results in is a material reality beyond the symbolic and how one engages with their surroundings. The incarnate knowledge of the hands, of a time, within history, is by no means a universal one, but rather a response to the apparatus and materials available. As Flusser explains:

The antinomy between the history of philosophy and the theory of gestures can perhaps be summarized as follows: the history of philosophy regards the gesture as a “universal phenomenon” in which a “universal human freedom” comes to expression (e.g., Hegelian spirit or Marxist subjectivity) so that the freedom does, in the course of time, come to expression. By contrast, the theory proposed here regards the gesture as a “quantized phenomenon” in which a specific, individual being-in-the-world is expressed in each instance, so that the expression occurs in a space-time specific to the individual, whereby an individual can, for his part, be considered *a knot in an intersubjective network*. (2014, p. 173)

Gesture then manifests the human subject as a knot in a network, and not as a universal consciousness and this inbetweenness offered by the body. This is what the chimpanzee reveals in its movements: not the gestures, but how gestures have come to define individuals as human beings. Not the chimpanzee, but the reactions to the ape and how these feed into a new paradigm, a time of reshaped gesturality.

In short, the chimpanzee is not gesturing like a human, but a human (a subject) becomes inculcated in the volume of relations produced by the movements of the chimpanzee. It is in this instance where the term gesture no longer becomes useful to define this phenomenon in its singular aspect (as a scroll is a gestural unit). It needs to be discussed in terms of its *gesturality*, or a perceptual organisation.

5.6 Chapter conclusion: The role of gesture in organising the perceptual break within the apparatus

This chapter examined how various perceptual breaks are overcome through *gesture* and how the interfacing with the novel apparatus of the selfie creates a volume of relations between the incarnate consciousness of the body, the grasping hand, and the vectors of perception drawn between them. It demonstrated gesture as a method of perceptual organisation between the individual and their relationship to an apparatus, through an examination of phenomenology and the writing of Flusser.

Ultimately, the research reveals that gesture is not solely dictated in terms of the apparatus, nor is it a complete individual mode of bodily expression: but an anaphora made manifest through a selection of embodied codes and programs.

However, while this research was presented here, and while gesture was complexified, how these aspects of the selfie inevitably come together in unique and specific instances has not been fully realised. Also, while a mention was given to Flusser's use of the term affect, it has not been fully realised. This work is presented in the next chapter. The reason this work has been delayed is because a comprehensive discussion on the interface (Chapter 1 and Chapter 2) and the gestural experience thereof (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5) was required first. However, in these terms, the selfie is still something quite non-specific. The following chapter, therefore, builds on the work presented in the preceding chapters to examine the image of the body created by the selfie through a gestural *assembling* of the subject.

6 THE GESTURAL ASSEMBLING OF THE BODY WITHIN THE SELFIE THROUGH PERCEPTUAL AFFECTS

6.1 Chapter introduction, research question, and method of analysis

The research presented on the mirror interface (Chapter 1 to Chapter 3) and gesture (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5) has argued that an interrogation of the selfie requires an interrogation of the mirror, and these investigations are required at the level of gesture. However, these two discussions have ostensibly run in parallel, leaving two sets of differing conclusions. The first set of findings posited that the myth of invisibility results in a desubjectification that subverts critical readings of the liberating potential of the selfie; the mirror is an apparatus, and therefore an individual is relegated to the role of being subject to this surface. The second set of conclusions demonstrated how such a conclusion is complicated through gesture insofar as gestures occur at the level of (phenomenal) experience. The invisibility of the mirror, and how this invisibility plays out in the novel selfie interface, is neither discursive nor a result of any specific dominant power strategy. Instead, this invisibility is the result of a phenomenal experience which has undergone an embodied naturalisation in how gesture moved from being invisible to being human.

These two discussions have ultimately resulted in two research questions that require answering if the relationship between selfie, gesture, mirror, subject and so on is to be completely realised. These questions are:

1. How do the experiential phenomena of gesture become organised within the novel selfie interface?
2. What does this organisation reveal about how the body becomes desubjectified through the gesture in terms of this apparatus?

Neither the theories of the apparatus presented in Chapter 3, nor the phenomenological consideration given in Chapter 4 can answer these questions; instead, this chapter posits that synthesis and answers can be found through theories of assemblage and theories of affect dealing with perception and the human body. In short, this chapter demonstrates how the inextricable properties of assemblage and affect offer

a means of developing a framework upon which a considered and unified interrogation of the mirror and gesture can be developed.

Practically, this chapter begins by conceptualising assemblage.³⁰ Assemblage theory provides a methodological vocabulary that allows for the selfie to be considered as a volume of relations composed through the co-functioning of various heterogeneous parts (i.e., the mirror, gesture, the body, the screen). Furthermore, assemblage offers a development of the presented theories of apparatus (such as that discussed in Chapter 3). Glibly, while apparatus can be understood as an *organisation* of something, assemblage is a method for contending with how something has come *to be organised*. This distinction is slight, and there is inevitably going to be a considerable crossover between the two terms. Foucault would show significant relation between the two concepts in his published lecture series titled *Security, Territory, Population* (2014). He refers to assemblages (2014, p. 296) and apparatus concomitantly in which the assemblage is defined in terms of dynamic forces, while the apparatus operates to preserve such forces. This will be extrapolated below.

While assemblage is presented as an arranging of relational forces, the concept of affect is used to describe the substance (the “stuff”) of those relations. The work in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 demonstrated how gesture results in a volume of relations through how it is (mis)recognised within the symbolic register. The concept of affect offers a vocabulary that speaks more directly to the inbetweenness of gesture that was earlier defined through Agamben’s “communication of a communicability” (2000, p. 58, Section 5.4.1) or the Kristevian *anaphora* of gesture (Section 5.3). Although the theoretical relationship between affect and gesture is directly examined in Flusser’s research on gesture (2014, p. 5-7), the use of affect in this chapter is not explicitly Flusserian even though his work on both gesture and the apparatus are heavily cited and referred to throughout this thesis. Instead, the use of affect here is heavily indebted to the conceptualising presented in Brian Massumi’s *Parables of the Virtual* (2002), where affect becomes a methodological vector used to navigate the difficulties that account for both the discursive and signifying properties of the apparatus

³⁰ In terms of assemblage, it is the work of Deleuze (1992), along with his work with Guattari (1987) and with Parnet (2007), that provide the foundation of this term. However, the work on assemblage is developed further through the writing of DeLanda (2016), who provides an efficient and pragmatic way of reading assemblage.

(2002, p. 2) and the more experiential and perceptual focus of phenomenology (2015). This is achieved by providing a methodological framework for navigating one of the central criticisms surrounding theories of the apparatus—already inferred in this thesis—where it is argued that it “may be difficult to imagine what the *kinds of experience* [emphasis added] proposed by [the apparatus] are supposed to feel like” (Terada 2001, p. 3), as, for some, the subject of the apparatus lives in a world that can be described as “blank [and] mechanistic” (Terada 2001, p. 3, cf. Section 4.4).

Therefore, a revised conceptualisation of the subject that is made possible through the conceptualisation of the body presented in *Parables of the Virtual* is offered in this chapter: a subject that is never complete as through its ability to perceive and experience it is always short of actual. In this revision, the determining of the subject through the apparatus is a definition defined not exclusively by stringent codes, programs, or dominant power strategies; instead, it shows that the process of becoming a subject is an experiential one, and therefore it is not enough to investigate the machinations and functions of an apparatus to articulate the position of the subject fully. The experiences of the subject, hereinbelow defined as a series of affects referred to as *bodying*, require inquest if the organisation of the subject is to be fully realised. Ultimately, affect is shown not to be *a way of feeling* nor *a way of thinking* (Thrift, 2016, p. 60), but rather affect can be used to illustrate how these two processes are ultimately inseparable through experience.

Ultimately, affect is determined to be a functor of an assembling of the human body. However, a conceptualisation of the body is expanded, and it is argued that *bodying* not only results in an image of the body but also impels *gesture*. This is a result of two critical concepts that are discussed: the “body without an image” and the “body-image” (Massumi, 2002, pp. 57-62). The word “image” in this context is used to describe impressions produced as phenomena, or—more specifically—produced through the extensity of these phenomena that provide them with perceptibility. Image is not used in the pictorial or representational sense. In this conceptualisation, an image of a thing is the quality of that thing that allow an individual to perceive—and therefore experience—it, or, crudely, an image is what phenomenology would refer to as *adumbrations* (further clarity will be provided throughout the chapter).

This movement between body-without-an-image to body-image is then discussed in relation to the mirror and camera through an analysis of a case study presented by Massumi on Ronald Reagan. This allows to demonstrably show how the perceptual organisation of the body through various assemblages and affects is gestural; and insofar as it “is always an assemblage which produces utterances” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2017, p. 51), the affect of these utterances is shown to be simultaneously discursive and phenomenological synthesising theories of the apparatus and phenomenology to demonstrably evidence how desubjectification occurs within the subject.

This chapter is heavily theoretical, but it is required that these concepts are unpicked and opened to fully realise this thesis. In doing so it provides a pointed theoretical foundation to synthesise and resolve the issue presented in the preceding chapters and step through concepts of assemblage, affect and the gestural assembling of the body. It is through the work on assemblage and affect that the mirror is returned to and, by implication, the selfie (directly in Chapter 7). Existing theories on how the mirror defines the subject—notably those presented in psychoanalysis—can be provided with increased complexity as the experience of viewing a reflection in the mirror becomes part of the process of desubjectification.

6.2 Methodological considerations required for the effective application of theories of assemblage

The term “assemblage” is a translation of the French *agencement* which denotes the process of putting together, laying out, or organisation and therefore, it is “important that *agencement* [(assemblage)] is not a static term [and should be understood as] ... not the arrangement or organization but the process of arranging, organizing, fitting together” (Wise, 2005, p. 77). In short, to make use of assemblage theory is not to look at a thing but instead consider how various parts have led to the existence of a thing, moment, organism, machine, etc.

The specifics of this distinction can be posited in how the selfie is spoken of. Bluntly, *a* single selfie is not an assemblage, but *the* selfie is an assemblage (the difference here being elicited in the definite (“a”) and indefinite (“the”) articles). When the selfie is described as an assemblage, a single instance of this

gesture or photograph or process is not being discussed; instead, the variety of parts that in their relation to one another allow for this object to occur is the assemblage. For example, the mobile phone, networked infrastructures, digital software technologies, and a variety of other aspects all operate and compose themselves together, and this composition is the selfie-assemblage. Therefore, a series of relationships are being examined when speaking in these terms. In sum, a selfie is not an assemblage; instead, an assemblage of component and constituent relations has come to intervolve one another resulting in the selfie.

Two methodological considerations are required before an examination of the selfie-assemblage can be presented.

First, the aspects of an assemblage are not only material or technological and the potential qualities of the potential parts of an assemblage are myriad: perceptions of space, embodied presence, social modes of use, histories of self-portraiture and self-representation, etc., all contribute to the selfie-assemblage. Therefore, while the assemblage is comprised of the material, the social, and the historical, modes of sensibility and perceptibility also find place in this network of interactions. Apparatus also form part of an assemblage, and, in this regard, assemblages could be understood as modes of apparatus. For example, the interface of the mobile device and its form factor (discussed in Chapter 1) can be assembled in the creation of the selfie but also assembled as a video conferencing machine. The distinction is a matter of organisation

It is not the parts that make the thing an assemblage. What makes an assemblage is how the *desires* of individuals become organised; but care is required with this term as an active redefining of desire was central to the development of assemblage theory. Commonly, desire is understood as a strong urge or longing for something. For instance, desire within the discipline of psychoanalysis is generally defined in terms of “lack” (Akhtar, 2009, p. 245) in which this “fundamental lack [creates] a hole in being that can only be satisfied by one “thing”—another(s) desires” (Grosz, 1990, p. 64). However, a reconceptualisation of desire was a central and over-arching dimension of the development of theories of the assemblage as it became re-inscribed as a more productive and life-affirming force (as opposed to

a lack, absence, or gap). This is the central thesis within Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1997), where they clarify:

In point of fact, if desire is the lack of the real object, its very nature as a real entity depends upon an “essence of lack” that produces the fantasized object. Desire thus conceived of as production, though merely the production of fantasies, has been explained perfectly by psychoanalysis. On the very lowest level of interpretation, this means that the real object that desire lacks is related to an extrinsic natural or social production, whereas desire intrinsically produces an imaginary object that functions as a double of reality, as though there were a “dreamed-of object behind every real object,” or a mental production. (1977, p. 25)

Desire is ultimately articulated as the producer of connections, a type of production that is not in search of an object as desire as its “object is one and the same thing” (1977, p. 26). Desire becomes organised through various flows and movements as relationships are formed and formulated between various heterogeneous parts. Details of how different combinations of heterogeneity are organised are presented in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987)³¹, with an assemblage being a prominent example. Through the multiplicity of the assemblage, “acts of semiotic flows, material flows and social flows” (1987, pp. 22-23) encounter one another simultaneously; these encounters are always underpinned or driven by desires of varying capacities and intensities. In short, the first thing to be noted when considering an assemblage is that it is an organisation of heterogeneous parts underpinned by desire.

The second thing to be mindful of when considering an assemblage is that each of these components or constituent parts can (and do) exist beyond their assembling. It is for this reason that Deleuze and Guattari refer to an assemblage as a “block of becoming” (1987, p. 238) as the intersection of these components, the changes they experience, and how they intervolve one another through desire results in something else. The wasp and the orchid exist separately from one another, each in their unique ontology; however, in that moment of their assembling, the wasp and the orchid live together and there “is a block of becoming that snaps up the wasp and the orchid, but from which no wasp-orchid can ever descend” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This is because an assemblage cannot be thought of in terms of generation or filiation as becoming is not an evolution but instead an alliance between parts that results

³¹ A companion text to *Anti-Oedipus* (1977).

in an *individual*. However, this assemblage is not perchance or the result of a random encounter. The orchid needs the wasp, and the wasp needs the orchid: but this same orchid can be visited by a beetle resulting in other assemblings. This is because the relationship formed between the various elements of the assemblage is—once again—not a relationship of whole objects or entities, but rather of parts that, within their assembling, allow for a type of production. This unification of parts results in a deterritorialization of the entity that is shared within their assembling. As written:

The line or block of becoming that unites the wasp and the orchid produces a shared deterritorialization: of the wasp, in that it becomes a liberated piece of the orchid's reproductive system, but also of the orchid, in that it becomes the object of an orgasm in the wasp, also liberated from its own reproduction. A coexistence of two asymmetrical movements that combine to form a block, down a line of flight that sweeps away selective pressures. The line, or the block, does not link the wasp to the orchid, any more than it conjugates or mixes them: it passes between them, carrying them away in a shared proximity in which the discernibility of points disappears. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 293-294)

In the case of the selfie, elements of this assemblage were each ostensibly conceived of for different purposes. In other words, the selfie was never invented (as discussed in relation to Paris Hilton's tweet in Section 1.2), but instead, it is the peculiar result of a specific combination of parts. An assemblage is better understood as a co-functioning or sympathy of components and not a combination (DeLanda, 2016, p. 17; Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 44). Relationships are formed through the ongoing process of reterritorialization and movements of deterritorialization occurring between these various parts. This is perhaps why there has been such difficulty and dissent in arguments surrounding the new-ness or old-ness of the selfie. When examining the selfie as an assemblage, it is possible to show how relations of the contemporary (the mobile phone, internet, Instagram) make the selfie "new" while traditions, histories, and specific (media) genealogies disavow such new-ness. The old and the new exist simultaneously in this assemblage. The relationship between the self-portraiture tradition and the selfie is not one of generation (the selfie is not a new mode of self-portraiture), but rather the selfie is in alliance with the history of self-portraiture through assemblage. The face is recognisable in both, but seemingly for distinctly different reasons³². This is also why the selfie is better understood not as an

³² see Zilio 2020 for an extended discussion on the invention of the human face and its historical formation.

image but as interfacing. The interface is always an assemblage. This is also why existing discursive practices (such as a myth of invisibility) manifest themselves within assemblages.

To demonstrate, take, for instance, the FFC (front-facing camera) of the mobile phone (examined in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2). It has a genealogy rooted in video conferencing yet has come to exist as a component within the selfie-assemblage. Therefore, today this camera is marketed as a selfie camera. The basic and intended functionality of the camera has not changed (besides various technological advancements), but the role of the camera in how various components are assembled emerges as a selfie camera; while in other instances co-functioning as a FaceTime camera, an FFC, part of the mirror, video camera and so on. This camera is ostensibly none of these things but is organised as each of these things within various assemblages.

This being said, reducing an assemblage to a collection of parts is an oversimplification. Rather, an assemblage should be understood as a collection of *relations*. It is various relations that instantiate an experience, with this experience not being the conclusion of this instantiation but another event from which further relations emerge (“event” here meaning a state of change). It is an open-ended mechanism, a constant becoming. To think again of the selfie; at that moment when the co-functioning of this assembling all operates together and all intersect at a particular time in a particular space what emerges is at once a single moment that is also a multiplicity: a picture, a photo, a gesture, a process, and an event fettered—or quilted—through the word “selfie”. However, importantly, the elements arranged through various desires are heterogeneous along two axes. Firstly, the assembling is heterogeneous as there are various flows convening together (the selfie is not only a photo but a gesture, process, meme, movement, action, the object of study of this thesis, etc.). However, on the other axis, they are different in terms of *parameter*. Each element is subject to various parameters, and these parameters—following DeLanda (2016, p. 19)—can metaphorically be understood as a series of dials or control knobs of intensity. Each element in the assembling is a variable, and therefore the parameters of an assemblage can change; the second meaning of volume in volume of relations (as described in Section 4.3.1). Each selfie comprises of a different phone, network, individual, face, gesture and so on, meaning that each selfie is different but still a selfie. The relationship with the device—the interface—is

consistent (grasping and looking), but the parameters of this change dynamically in each individual instance. The selfie becomes an event.

DeLanda discusses how an assemblage becomes an event through the adjustment of various parameters showing that an assemblage is always becoming unique. The term *haecceity* is invaluable here.

Haecceity was adopted from scholastic philosophy by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* and Deleuze and Parnet in *Dialogues* as a term that defines each instance in which an assemblage assembles (from the Latin *haecceitas*, which translates as “thisness”). Each instance—such as an instance of a selfie—is defined as an event (cf. Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 261-263 and Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, pp. 91-93), and thus, as haecceity, the assemblage becomes an event that is easily mistaken for an object or a thing, and the ability to recognise that assemblage as having such properties are a result of how an assemblage obtains a thisness (DeLanda, 2016, pp. 140-143). The thisness of each selfie—the adjustment of parameters that results in its uniqueness—is haecceity.

Haecceity is an invaluable methodological term for navigating the differences when discussing the selfie in terms of assemblage as opposed to discussing the selfie—or at least components of the selfie interface—in terms of apparatus. The determination of an assemblage or an apparatus is prone to slippage and overlap as both can be defined in terms of a coming together of various heterogeneous components. However, theories of the apparatus are limited in how it accounts for the individuality of the subject when presented as haecceity. At the most basic instance, an apparatus is determined through the determination of a subject, and this subject is one who is defined in terms of the apparatus.

However, the repetition of the creation of such subjects results in a regimentation, democratisation and standardisation of the various parameters afforded to the individual. Yet, as assemblage, an individual becomes—or rather the individual undergoes a becoming (to be explained momentarily)—through the result of variable parameters to become haecceity. In other words, the dominant strategies of the apparatus (in the desubjectification of Agamben (Section 3.3) or the *praeparare* of Flusser (Section 3.4)) delineates the horizons and possibilities of the subject; and provides the subject with the ability to speak (through curves of enunciation) and see (through curves of light; Deleuze, 1992, pp. 159-160) on its own terms.

Therefore, while the apparatus creates a subject, the assemblage creates what appears to be an individual. The concept of the individual requires revisiting through this conceptualisation. A flat and specific definition of this term has been consciously omitted thus far within this thesis as it is only once assemblage has been considered that the term can effectively be unpacked. As it stands, within this thesis, the term “individual” has been used interchangeably with the term “person”, but this is reductionist. The term individual does not have any specific preference in terms of type, scale, nor parameter. As DeLanda writes:

As an ontological category the term ‘individual’ has no preference for any one particular level of scale. It is perfectly possible to speak of individual communities, individual organisations, individual cities... individual atoms, individual molecules, individual cells, and individual organs. [However, all] these entities are assemblages, their defining emergent properties produced by their interacting parts, and therefore contingent on the occurrence of the requisite interactions. The historicity and individuality of all assemblages forces us as materialists to confront the question of historical process which produced or brought into being any given assemblage. We may refer to these as *process of individuation*. (2016, p. 140)

The process of individuation should not be misconstrued as a thing made individual as the process is ongoing (as assembling is ongoing). Rather, individuation, in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 260-261), is found between moments of movement and rest, speed and slowness. It is through this discussion of individuation that haecceity can emerge. As written:

A season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date have a perfect individuality lacking nothing, even though this individuality is different from that of a thing or a subject. They are haecceities in the sense that they consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected. (1987, p. 261)

The relationship between assemblage and affect is seen in this quote. However, before moving into a discussion of affect, existing research on the selfie and assemblage requires examination as this will allow for an anticipation of the methodological considerations particular to the selfie and assemblage and affect.

6.2.1 Specific methodology considerations for the selfie-assemblage and literature

An immediate set of methodological questions emerge in how the selfie-assemblage is dissected and investigated: how fine does the grain need to be, or how granular of a resolution should be considered when addressing such an assemblage? If an assemblage is a series of relationships, is it the responsibility of the researcher to consider all the possible relations of a particular assemblage?

No. Assemblage theory, methodologically, is not the process of creating a taxonomy of components or parts. In the work presented here, the selfie-assemblage is partly screenic in its relationship to the mirror (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, with the word screenic accounting for the more general phenomena that occur in relation to or as an effect of screens, not only the formal, ontic screen-object (see Chateau & Moure, 2006, pp.15-16)) and partly gestural (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). Of course, this means that there appear to be some omissions (the network, the self, social media, etc.), but through assemblage theory an interrogation of the selfie can focus on specific stages of the selfie-taking process. This shows that in its totality, then, the selfie is neither completely its life online nor the moments leading up to its creation. It is both these moments and (in fact) also various other moments. The attention of this writing is focused on those moments preceding the capturing and sharing that is a result of this assemblage: grasping the device, extending the phone forward, looking into the digital mirror, and how gesture instantiates an image of the body during this process. It could be rebutted that this is not a complete selfie, but it cannot be denied that these elements are fundamental to whatever supposed completeness this assemblage is said to exhibit. In other words, not a series of discrete moments but rather various flows.

DeLanda attempts to uncover the individual within such flows by speaking in terms of assemblages of assemblages (2016, pp. 6-7) in response to how Deleuze and Guattari “introduce further categories of being to define the different kind of components” (2016, p. 7). However, DeLanda instead resists such categorisation and instead talks in terms of smaller and larger assemblages that occur together. In doing so, methodologically, it is then much more convenient to define specific assemblages within a larger assembling (such as the interface in lieu of the entire selfie). As presented:

Hence, replacing bodies (and other component types) and contextual conditions by smaller and larger assemblages, respectively, allows us to sidestep this difficulty. It also yields a view of reality in which assemblages are everywhere, multiplying in every direction, some more viscous and changing at slower speeds, some more fluid and impermanent, coming into being almost as fast as they disappear. And at the limit, at the critical threshold when the diagrams of assemblages reach escape velocity, we find the grand cosmic assemblage, the plane of immanence, consistency, or exteriority. (2016, p. 6)

Of course, by not considering all parts of an assemblage, it is possible to become ensnared in another methodological failing. In the case of Hess's article (cited in Chapter 1), the selfie-assemblage includes the self, network, physical space and so on. Yet, these particulars of the selfie-assemblage are not only particular to the selfie, and their (re)arrangements can result in other assemblings thus presented through other, ostensibly, non-selfie haecceities. What this means is that there are various other forms of digital media—within their assemblages—that the self, network, physical space, and so on also feature prominently (virtual reality, for example). Therefore, several of the images of selfies Hess uses as examples simply aren't.³³ However, these errors on the part of Hess are not presented as such to undermine the veracity of his research: quite the opposite. This indicates how various components of an assemblage can have different intensities within their assembling. While more pedantic parties may argue that these are not selfies, the examples used by Hess all certainly exemplify the selfie-assemblage and how the selfie-assemblage can, on occasion, not result in selfies.

This research was faced with a similar problem. The digital mirror and gesture are certainly key to the selfie: but these aspects can exist in other assemblages as well (a Skype or Zoom call, for instance). Therefore, when faced with the methodological issue of considering all parts of an assemblage, it is, instead, perhaps more fruitful to be specific in selecting which components are to be analysed, knowing full well that these components do not reveal the fullness of the assemblage. To reiterate once again, assemblage theory is less concerned with an analysis of specific parts and more valuable when revealing the nature of the relations formed in the arranging of parts. In short: not an examination of parts, but an examination of organisation.

³³ Both Figure 2. ("A photoshopped selfie fail" (2015, p. 1634)) and Figure 4. ("A too authentic selfie fail"), and possibly figure 1. ("Occupy Wall Street selfie") appear to be photographed by someone not contained in the image undermining the self-portrait aspect of these supposed selfies.

This organisation requires examination through its affects.

6.3 Affects as a functor of the assembling of the novel selfie interface

Ultimately, to say that the selfie, in its haecceities, is the result of an assemblage is neither unique (Hess, 2015) nor novel. However, it is a valuable means of investigating the co-functioning of various relations that are made manifest within this selfie-assemblage: how this co-functioning results in an articulation of the body in relation to the object that resists any clear distinction between the body and device. To say that a selfie is a body gesturing before a mirror (that happens to be digital) offers nothing new as the assemblage is more than just these parts laid side by side. The parameter that complicates this relationship is how affect operates as a functor (a term discussed momentarily) of the relationship between the body, the mirror, and the camera; and how, in turn, it impels the body into gesturing. Methodologically, the question of “why does this assemblage result in selfies?” is not as valuable as asking “how does the body gesture itself into the selfie-assemblage?”; or, perhaps better, “what does the possibility of the selfie-assemblage reveal about how the body gestures?”.

It is easy to mistakenly think of affect as the substance between two or more bodies. For example, the subject (a body) and the mobile device (another body) develop a relationship, and this relationship can be called affect. But this is incorrect. Rather, the subject (a body) and the mobile device (another body) develop a relationship through their interaction. The two bodies change each other, and the subject is redefined in terms of the device and the use, function, and potential of the device is (re)determined in terms of the desires of the subject. There is a process or an unfolding as these two bodies become entangled.³⁴ They are still two distinct bodies, but through affect, they operate and assemble as one.

³⁴ Entangled is adopted from Karen Barad and is central to Barad’s wider agential realist theoretical framework (2007; 2008). In short, the two bodies do not interact with one another (the subject and the device), rather there is an *intra-action* that “signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies” (2008, p., 33). What *intra-action* essentially shows is that the relationship between the body and technology is not interactive (a performance), but *intra-active* (performative) and the ability to act emerges from within (*intra-*) the relationship between the body and technology, and not outside of it. Or in Barad’s words “in contrast to the usual ‘interaction,’ which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of *intra-action* recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their *intra-action*” (2008, p., 33). Barad’s acquisition of the neologism is taken from the work of Joseph Rouse (see Rouse 2002), however her expansion of its critical capacity is seen in her later writings (see Barad 2002 and Barad 2008).

This definition of affect (initially presented in Chapter 1) stems from the work of Deleuze and Guattari, which is in turn developed through the earlier philosophical work of Spinoza (who wrote of *affectus*).³⁵ Affect is a change that occurs when various bodies meet and interact: when bodies develop a relationship (bodies here not defined in terms of a human body, but any collection of relationships. This is clarified further down). This translation is prevalent in Massumi and will get more attention later, but for now, it can be summarised as such:

For Spinoza, human psychology is manifold, a complex body arising out of interaction which is an alliance of many simple bodies and which therefore exhibits what nowadays would be called emergence—the capacity to demonstrate powers at higher levels of organization which do not exist at other levels; “an individual may be characterised by a fixed number of definite properties (extensive and qualitative) and yet possess an in-definite number of capacities to affect and be affected by other individuals”. (Thrift, 2016, p. 62, with a citation from DeLanda (2002, p. 62))

As Deleuze and Guattari write in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

To every relation of movement and rest, speed and slowness grouping together an infinity of parts, there corresponds a degree of power. To the relations composing, decomposing, or modifying an individual there correspond intensities that affect it, augmenting or diminishing its power to act; these intensities come from external parts or from the individual’s own parts. Affects are becomings. (1987, p. 256)

The relation discussed here is a relation of bodies, but the word “body” is not used in the sense of a human body and is rather used as a category that defines a component of an individuated assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 257). They use the example of the tick³⁶ and exemplify how a tick is only under the auspice of three affects: the enticement of the light of the sun that results in the arachnid climbing a branch, the presence of carbon dioxide of a mammalian body that causes the tick to quest towards another body, and the discovery of a bald patch upon which it can pierce the skin. This is assembling, and it is an assembling of multiple bodies: the tick, the sun, the branch, the carbon dioxide, the prey, the quest, the skin, the hair, etc. Within the tick-bite assemblage, the individuation that takes place is through relationships of affect. Affects are not the *feeling* of the heat of the sun or the *smell* of

³⁵ The re-emergence of Spinoza’s work and how it came to influence Deleuze’s ethological reinterpretation of monism echoes loudly in both the posthuman and the postdigital (cf. Braidotti, 2013; Pepperell, 1995; Pepperell & Punt, 2000).

³⁶ The example of the tick is adopted from Jacob von Uexküll’s “A stroll through the worlds of animals and men: A picture of invisible worlds” (1934)

the carbon dioxide in the Haller organ of the parasite: an affect is how these feelings, smells, movements result in relations forming between the bodies (cf. the relationship between a bald patch of skin and a mosquito). As they continue:

We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 257)

This is why it is argued that affect can be conceived as a functor³⁷ of an assemblage. To be a functor is to be requisite for the existence of a thing (this is distinct from being a function of something as the term “function” means something that a thing can do). It is inadequate to use theories of assemblage to indicate the heterogeneity of an arrangement; what is essential is to understand how through the functor of affect various bodies oblige “movement and rest” (1987, p. 256). To reiterate, to posit that the selfie is comprised of a new and novel interface is only a valuable conclusion if this statement is used to understand how the various bodies within this taxonomy—hand, eye, mirror, screen, camera, face, time of day, histories of self-portrait—impel relations through the result of affects; to reveal how this interfacing collapses into gesture.

Massumi’s *Parables for the Virtual* is an important text to examine this collapse into gesture as it provides a complex discussion on bodies and affects explicitly in terms of the human body. The human body as an assemblage could be examined and dissected in terms of biological parameters (muscles, organs, joints etc.), socially-, politically-, and culturally inscribed parameters (identity, race, gender, etc.), but for Massumi, it is the perceptual parameters that are central to his project. This is not to say that the biology and culture of the human body are not crucial to Massumi; however, his focus is on a middle-ness between perception and action as a type of bodily intensity (2002, pp. 16-17); a non-

³⁷ In Guattari’s original French version of *Chaosmose* (1992) he discusses “l’agencement des quatre foncteurs ontologiques” ([the assembling of the four functions of ontology], Guattari, 1992, p. 88). Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis’s English translation of this text, *Chaosmosis* (1995), translates the term *foncteur* as function when discussing the assemblage of ontology (virtual, actual, real, possible; (1995, pp. 58-76)). However, the word functor was used in Andrew Goffery’s translation of Guattari’s other work, *Schizoanalytic Cartographies* (2013), and in Robert Bononno’s translation of Pierre Lévy’s *Becoming Virtual: Reality in the Digital Age* (1998, p. 196). In fact, even though Anne Friedberg cites Bains and Pefanis’s translation, she also prefers the term functor over the word function. This research sides with Goffery, Bononno and Friedberg and decided on the word functor when discussing the various ontological considerations of Guattari’s work.

structured, non-signifying force that is formless and only apparent after it has been actualised (Leys, 2011, p. 442). As critic Eric Shouse writes, these intensities are “unformed and unstructured potential [and...] cannot be fully realised in language... because affect is always prior to and/or outside of consciousness” (2005). Regarding the selfie, such a definition of affect can inform a method for negotiating the complex set of bodily intensities formed between the eye, mirror, grasping hand, and the body and how this emerges as gesture; all of which are vital components of the selfie that comes to be assembled. This intensity is not the intensity of the apparatus, nor the weight of the phenomena, but the perceptual vector between them that draws them into one another. For ease of expression such a theory of affect will be referred to as “perceptual affect” from this point forward to navigate various criticism lodged against such research and distinguish it from other work on affect.

Although conceptualisations of perceptual affect are ostensibly useful before any conclusions can be convincingly posited, various critics of affect and its relationship with the perceptual body need to be addressed. Of particular note is “The turn to affect: A critique” by Ruth Leys (2011) and an examination of affect by Margaret Wetherell titled *Affect and Emotion* (2012). These criticisms ask two overarching thematic questions of perceptual affect theories: firstly, questions of emotion and its relation to perceptual affect and, secondly, questions of the body and how it is defined. The research presented in such criticisms is not an outright dismissal of perceptual affect theories (or affect theory more generally) but rather an attempt to forgo some of the more troubling propositions and methodological brambles encountered when speaking in these terms to further enrich its critical potential.

6.3.1 Criticism one: Emotion and perceptual affect

A central contention against researchers working in perceptual affect is how they contend with affect, on the one hand, and emotion, on the other. This is commonly referred to as the affect/emotion split.

Susanne Ngai writes on this debate:

[The] affect/emotion split originated in psychoanalysis for the practical purpose of distinguishing third-person from first-person representations of feeling, with “affect” designating feeling described from an observer’s (analyst’s) perspective, and “emotion” designating feeling that “belongs” to the speaker or analysand’s “I.” (2005, p. 25)

This conflation of affect and emotion is ostensibly linked to the research of Silvan Tomkins that was later given attention within the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003). Tomkin's set of affects, presented in *Affect Imagery Consciousness* (2008), include interest, joy, surprise, anger, fear, distress, disgust, and, most centrally, shame, leading to what can be conceptualised as a series of emotional drives. However, although the work of Tomkins was rooted in psychology and psychoanalysis, Sedgwick reiterates throughout *Touching Feeling* (2003) that reducing affect to a drive is destructive (2003, pp. 17-18, 95-100) as affect becomes an affect of the apparatus, and, for Sedgwick, this affect is autotelic (an end in itself) and is not intentional in the same way that drives are.

Affect, itself, as a discipline or object of study has ultimately become an assemblage in and of itself as the vocabulary surrounding affect (feelings, drives, emotions, etc.) has become quite difficult to parse at times. In response to this, the research here follows others (Grossberg, 1992; Massumi, 2002; Shouse, 2005) who recommend that perceptual affect be discussed remotely from emotion. This is not because they are different, but rather because perceptual affect always precedes emotion, and emotion stems from affect as they are various stages of the same process (the middleliness between perception and action). However, it is imperative to note that affect will not always result in an emotional expression; emotion is just a single way of individuating affect. In other words, perceptual affect does not always result in emotion, but you cannot have emotion without perceptual affect and emotion can thus be considered as haecceity thereof. Nevertheless, it still stands that affect can be viewed without considering emotion directly. In short, within this research, perceptual affect is not defined in terms of emotion or feeling, not *affection*. Affect is defined in terms of perception and how perception is made possible.

6.3.2 Criticism two: Perceptual affect and the body

The second central concern within theories of perceptual affect surround questions of the body. A new corporality was said to emerge in affect theory in "Biology's gift: Interrogating the turn to affect" (2010) by Constantina Papoulias and Felicity Callard and "The human sciences in a biological age" (2013) by Nikolas Rose. The criticism forwards that while affect theory argues for a move away from—or at least a new interrogation of—mind/body dualism, these theories struggle to escape it. Massumi, for example,

outright calls for a return to “The Body” (2002, p. 2) as an opening salvo in his text while human geographer Nigel Thrift wrestles with the body in his book *Non-Representational Theory* (2007). Thrift writes that the “distance from biology is no longer seen as a prime marker of social and cultural theory [and] it has become increasingly evident that the biological constitution of being has to be taken into account” (Thrift, 2007) with this return to biology being a marker of “good theory”. For this reason, the topic of the body then became one of the central tentpoles of what Patricia Clough called the affective turn (2008), and its place in affect theory has been a central but troubling one since.

It is important to keep in mind that the criticism regarding the body within perceptual theories of affect is not a denial of the place of the body in affect theory: the primary concern is methodological. Leys, for example, forwards that various perceptual affect theorists used rather cherry-picked studies and experiments to justify their claims regarding perceptual affects as bodily intensity undermining the supposedly enriched and renewed conversation occurring between the humanities and the hard sciences such as neuroscience. It is argued the affect theorists engage “in rather opaque philosophical-speculative reflections in which the neurosciences make... fleeting appearances... [or] play a more prominent role [and] not ... argue for the importance of the neurosciences in the study of affect, they also appeal to particular neuroscientific experiments in order to justify their views” (Leys, 2011, pp. 443-444). At best, what Leys demonstrates effectively is that affect theorists appear to make use of the hard sciences to justify their claims from a more empirical basis. Yet, at worst, this justification is based on ill-conceived readings, refutable sources, and studies that have since been dismissed by more contemporary research in these fields. As an example, Leys makes considerable reference to what has become known as Massumi’s half-second, the idea that the “mind intervenes *half a second* too late to play the role usually attributed to it in human behaviour” (Leys, 2017, p. 324) thus revealing a complex relationship between mind and body or mind and matter. This criticism has been repeated elsewhere as well (Papoulias & Callard, 2010, p. 48; Rose, 2013, pp. 11-12). Massumi’s discussion of the half-second is generated from an experiment by Benjamin Libet (1985) of which the conclusion has since largely been brought into doubt (Leys, 2017, p. 453). This is one example of how an affect theorist uses bad science to justify their claims.

This thesis does not refute either criticism (regarding emotion or the body). Instead, it would be more productive to offer three brief responses to them worth noting (in Massumi's work in particular). First, theories of perceptual affect take into consideration that conversations with neuroscience are fraught with limitations, but to argue that these theories use such studies to empirically posit some quality of affect is ostensibly a misreading of these contributions. Second, criticism of Massumi tends to focus on a single chapter of his text (the "Autonomy of affect" (2002)) and does not account for the applications of affect made later throughout his work. Third, theories of perceptual affect are not nearly as dismissive of phenomenology as the critics would assert.

These responses can be shown by discussing how perceptual affect is not concerned with the body that is understood as a human body, but the bodying that results in this body being human. It illustrates how these points are best clarified by distinguishing the body (as object) and bodying (as process), which is central to how the selfie, the object of this study, is being articulated here as a gestural assemblage. This, ultimately, offers an invaluable framework for beginning the conversation of gesture within an assembling.

6.4 Echoes of phenomenology as method in describing the bodying of perceptual affects

A central dynamic to bodying within perceptual affect theories borrows from a discussion by Deleuze and Guattari (in a later work titled *What is Philosophy* (1994)), where affect is discussed in relation to percepts. In their text affects and percepts are examined in terms of aesthetics and art following a definition of the thing of art as "*a bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects*" (1994, p. 164). They continue:

Percepts are no longer perceptions; they are independent of a state of those who experience them. Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them. Sensations, percepts, and affects are beings whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived. They could be said to exist in the absence of man because man, as he is caught in stone, on the canvas, or by words, is himself a compound of percepts and affects. The work of art is a being of sensation and nothing else: it exists in itself. (1994, p. 164)

In Massumi's work it is noteworthy to understand this relationship between percepts and affects as a bodying when discussed in terms of a human body. Massumi draws readily from the phenomenological tradition in how he situates experience in relation to thinking to the point of them being inseparable. This is not to say that affect is a way of thinking—as others have described it (Thrift, 2016, p. 60)—rather affect is at least partly experiential for Massumi. This is directly referenced in an interview with Massumi conducted by Arno Boehler:

This for me is one of the interesting aspects of the question of what a body can do: 'Can a body think?' If you define mentality as Whitehead does—as the capacity to exceed what is given and bring forth a novelty—then an improvisational variation playing on an instinctive activity, even in an animal without a brain, shows a certain degree or mode of mentality. This conception of mentality breaks down the Cartesian distinction between the mental and the physical, but without simply collapsing them into each other, or bracketing one out. It forces you to rethink how you define the physical and the mental, how you parse them together. (Massumi, 2015, pp. 178-179)

It is clear in this quote that Massumi wishes to expand the conceptualisation of the body beyond the work of phenomenology through the extended definition presented by Deleuze and Guattari (as a component category of assemblage). While the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty endeavoured towards the collapse of mind-body dualism, Massumi appears to be neither dismissing this dualism nor attempting to reinforce the separation of the mind and body. Instead, there is a breaking-down of the relationship that obliges a rethinking. Massumi's use of the word "bracketing" reinforces his relationship with phenomenology (as discussed in Section 4.5.1). However, there can be no bracketing in the philosophy of the body expressed by Massumi. Again, no hard separation.

This is perhaps why critics such as Leys (2017, p. 455) and Wetherall (2012, pp. 53-54) accuse Massumi (and others writing on perceptual affect) of being unable to escape mind/body dualism as there is an iterative return to the question of what a body can do. However, this should be rephrased. In the interview, the question of "what a body can do" is asked directly; however, a further question is being implied through this question: "what image of the body is created via doing (action, or, useful here, gesture)?" This emphasises that the role of phenomenology in Massumi's thinking is central to conceiving how there is not a body in Massumi's work, but rather a bodying and this bodying (as his interview concludes) is one "who affects and can be affected" (2015, p. 203). The process of

experiencing as bodying is amalgamated in the combination of movements and sensations that are comprised of percepts (that is experience, the heat of the sun on a tick), and affects (the effect these percepts have, the tick climbing the branch). If the body in affect is a bodying, how is it articulated or created through these relations?

It is created through a transition of body-without-an-image to body-image.

6.5 The body as a category of organisation between body-without-an-image and body-image, and how this is seen in the mirror

The body-without-an-image requires acknowledging. Firstly, a distinction needs to be drawn between the use of the word “body” in Massumi and the use of the term “body” in Deleuze and Guattari. Second, some clarity on the relationship between body-without-an-image and body-without-organs is required as a familiarity with the concept body-without-organs could lead to some confusion when examining body-without-an-image (if for no other reason than their similar nomenclature). The phrase body-without-organs is used throughout the research of Deleuze (1990, p. 88) and his research with Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 149-151). It is a phrase borrowed from a radio play by playwright Antonin Artaud titled *To Have Done With the Judgment of god* (1948). It is described as “not an empty body stripped of organs, but a body upon which that which serves as organs ... is distributed” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 30) and in this regard “exists within stratified fields of organisation at the same time as it offers an alternative mode of being or experience” (Message 2010, p. 38). The body-without-an-image and the body-without-organs are two wholly distinct and discernible vectors of considering how affect and the body result in a specific means of assembling or organisation. They are, bluntly, completely different concepts. In other words, methodologically, it is required that the body-without-organs is mentioned if for no other reason than to draw a line in the sand separating these two ideas and making their distinctions readily apparent.

On the first point (distinguishing the body in Massumi and the body in Deleuze and Guattari), the body for Massumi is more directly understood as a human body, but not quite; although it is certainly more discernible than the body in Deleuze and Guattari. As mentioned in Section 6.2 when discussing

assemblage, a body in Deleuze and Guattari can refer to any component of an assemblage between which the gravity of affect results in a becoming. Any multiplicity of arrangements organised into the impression of a single unit. A body in this vocabulary is not exclusively a human body, but the body is an arrangement or an organisation of affects. As Bruce Baugh writes, the “human body is just one example of such a body; the animal body is another, but a body can also be a body of work, a social body or collectivity, a linguistic corpus, a political party, or even an idea” (in Parr, 2010, p. 36).

Generally, then, the body in Deleuze and Guattari needs to be understood more generally.

When Massumi discusses the body in *Parables for the Virtual* he is discussing the human body explicitly. This is not to say that he is returning to an organism of bones, sinew, nerves, blood, hair, genitals, etc. Instead, he is concerned with how these aspects of the body have become largely absent from twentieth century theory (2002, pp. 2-6). He then sets out to return the human body to (critical) theory as he argues that the body has been absent from various discussions within cultural studies and aesthetics. However, the absence alluded to by Massumi is not an absence in terms of being not present, but rather an absence in how it has been articulated. He posits that the body has been provided with a positionality in how it is theorised as little more than a site within an “oppositional framework of culturally constructed significations: male versus female, black versus white, gay versus straight” (2002, p. 2). In doing so the body becomes gridlock into the positional grid and the affective and perceptive potential of movements of the body are completely ignored.

To articulate this in another way, one not presented by Massumi but perhaps clearer in the vocabulary already articulated in this thesis, Massumi is concerned with *haecceities of the human body* at the level of perception, and the resulting vectors of affect emerging in these instances. Perception is for all intents and purposes a parameter of the body, but perception has by and large been “left behind because [it is] difficult to reconcile with the new understandings of the structuring capacities of culture and their inseparability both from the exercise of power and the glimmers of counterpower incumbent in mediated living” (2002, p. 2). He is contending with the difficulties alluded to in Chapter 4 between theories of the apparatus and theories phenomenology, echoing Terada’s question (cited in Section 6.1) of how this body is supposed to experience (2001, p. 3), and forwarding that a return to the sensing or

perceptive protentional capacity of the body is a way of navigating this. In short, his research is asking: How can haecceities of perception be defined in terms of the apparatus?

It is worth illustrating this in terms of the selfie to better illustrate this distinction. In terms of Deleuze and Guattari, the selfie-assemblage comprises various bodies (such as those mentioned above, and those indicated in Hess (2015)). The bodies here include the screen-body, mirror-body, gesture-body, network-body, etc. (an assemblage of assemblages, as DeLanda would forward). Affect is the gravitational functor between these bodies that allows for them to emerge (individuate) as a single selfie haecceity (this selfie, or that selfie). Following Massumi's line, this can be further extended to illustrate the role of perceptions within this assembling that in turn emerge as their haecceities of perception. As argued in Chapter 1, the selfie is an interfacing with an arrangement of apparatus that results in various methods of perception (looks) and gestures (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). But through the framework of perceptual affect it can be understood how perception changes in each instance of such interfacing as these relationships will always be defined in those terms (this is further exemplified in the case study in Chapter 7).

While some have criticised Massumi for using select scientific studies of the body to justify his claims (as mentioned in Section 6.3.2), it is vital to remember the body in Massumi is always virtual and waiting to become actual (2002, p. 30); the potential for body-without-an-image to become body-image through various affects. The virtual here is something that is real (it exists), but is not actual (possible to be perceived, or accounted through percepts or language(s)). Ultimately—and this is perhaps the most pertinent point—there cannot be a movement from body-without-an-image into a body-image that encounters an assemblage. Rather, what is being posited is that there is an encounter between the body-without-an-image and an assemblage that is *actualised as body-image*. The dimensions, borders, horizons and/or potentials of this (body) image are described by the component parts of the assemblage. The selfie-assemblage may result in a selfie-haecceity, but this is fundamentally reliant on the production of an image of the body that can be expressed within this assembling. Through the selfie the body is perceived in the manner the body allows for itself to be perceived. This organisation of perception is bodying.

And while, admittedly, this is certainly reminiscent of the “rather opaque philosophical-speculative reflections” (2011, p. 444) regarding affect (criticised by Leys), this is because the available metaphors to describe this relationship (image) can inhibit precisely what is occurring here. In the same way the wasp can exist without the orchid, my body exists without the selfie, but when they encounter the relations that occur emerge not only as parts of the whole, but as an expression of perception.

6.5.1 The Reagan case study

Massumi demonstrates bodying in a close reading of an extract from Ronald Reagan’s autobiography *Where Is the Rest of Me* (Reagan & Hubler, 1968). Discussed at length (conveniently) is Reagan’s experience of seeing himself in a mirror and seeing himself on screen in the rushes* while filming a movie. In Reagan’s words:

It has taken me many years to get used to seeing myself as others see me, and also seeing myself instead of my mental picture of the character I’m playing. First of all, very few of us ever see ourselves except as we look directly at ourselves in a mirror. Thus we don’t know how we look from behind, from the side, walking, standing, moving normally through a room. It’s quite a jolt. Second is the fact that when you read a story you create a mental picture of each character. For the first few years this is true even in reading a script! You don’t see yourself because you haven’t had much experience in seeing yourself. Thus as you act the part, in your mind you envision your mental picture. (Reagan & Hubler, 1968, pp. 78-79, cited in Massumi, 2004, pp. 46-47)

Reagan discusses how he has been offered a particular privilege as an actor of the 1930s and 40s: seeing himself on-screen after being filmed. He was one of the (self-appointed) few who got to see *himself*; not himself reflected in the mirror, but as a figure on the screen.

Reagan experiences a jolt in response to the difference he encounters when seeing himself reflected in the mirror and seeing himself on screen as seen by others. It is into this jolt that Massumi digs. Massumi questions why the responses to these two moments of perception are so different; why it is easy for an individual to see themselves in the mirror and challenging to see themselves on screen. While the literature examining the selfie discussed in Section 1.3 and Section 2.3 would argue that this is because

* Rushes refer to the daily rushes or dailies used within film production. It describes the raw footage of the day played back before any post-production or editing can take place.

the mirror is being truthful and the screen—or specifically in their case the photograph—is spurious, there is far more complexity in what is happening. Massumi rejects that the image in the mirror is truthful and the image on screen is fictitious. Rather, as he writes:

What is clear is that Reagan is not concerned with the difference between reality and appearance. He seems to be speaking of two orders of reality—both of which are composed of appearance, understood more in a performative than epistemological sense. The relevant distinction is not between reality and appearance, true and false, acting and not acting, seeing and not seeing oneself as others see one. The pertinent criterion of evaluation is ontological and cuts across those registers. It bears on the completeness of an appearance, which it locates on a scale of intensity, as a higher- or lower-degree reality. (2002, pp. 47-48)

The process of recognising a reflection in the mirror and recognising a body on screen should not be considered as separate; instead, they are both strata of a similar phenomenon in which the image of the body is perceived. There is a disillusion of the binary of accurate/inaccurate, authentic/inauthentic, correct/incorrect images of the body in perception, and instead, there is a need to step back and rather investigate *how* the body perceives itself as a body through the complex levels of perception (degrees of reality) affronted here. Consider this in the context of the literature presented in Section 1.3 and Section 2.3. The work of those attempting to discern the mirror-image and the camera-image spoke about the different types of perception in each instance; however, these may be distinct affects, but they are distinct affects assembled in a single moment (in the case of the selfie): it is perception made different in intensity through the DeLandian control knobs and dials of its parameters.

To put this another way: these are two affects of a single assembling. The assemblage is one of recognition in which Reagan expresses the capacity to recognise himself. The first affect is him seeing himself looking into the mirror (referred to as mirror-vision), the second affect is him seeing himself as others see him (referred to as movement-vision).

6.5.1.1 Mirror-vision

This first recognition-affect Massumi refers to as “mirror-vision” (2002, p. 48). While Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of this thesis discussed how the mirror as an apparatus impels a reaction and not a reflection, theories on how a mirror allows an individual to recognise themselves, were not discussed. Mirror-vision

can be used as a starting point. However, mirror-vision is more valuable in context and appears (if not explicitly) to tie the mirror to sociologist Charles Cooley's concept of the looking glass-self where a "thing that moves us to pride or shame is not the mere mechanical reflection of ourselves, but an imputed sentiment" (2017, p. 107): the imputed sentiment being read as the hegemonic or socially expected weight an individual experiences perceiving themselves perceiving (cf. the description of the *honnête homme* in Melchior-Bonnet 2001, pp. 146-147). Massumi writes that every "time you really see yourself [in the mirror] well, there you are" (2002, p. 48) as the reflection in the mirror develops not a visual line but a narrative line: the image in the mirror is "nonvisual, it is a narrative line" (2002, p. 47). As written:

You mirror yourself in your supporting actor's eyes, and they in yours. A reciprocal difference stretches between paired retinal surfaces. Between them runs a narrative line carrying both social players across a series of regulated thresholds. You resemble each other more fundamentally than you differ, by virtue of your shared participation in the same narrative. The difference between you and your specular complement is the minimal difference allowing movement. The axes of vision are at slightly skewed angles, so that the mutually self-defining recognition always imperceptibly misses. This perspectival disjunction creates just enough of an imbalance to prevent fusion. (2002, pp. 48-49)

An individual sees an individual in the mirror over there, and this individual is a social player that resembles themselves. In being a narrative, it is a continuity. Therefore, the body is recognised because the mirror allows for its reflection and not because it is reflected in the mirror. The true mystery of the mirror is not that an individual can recognise themselves, but that the individual in the mirror yesterday, the previous year, a decade ago is still narrativized within this same continuity. The vision here, the mode of perception, is one of continuity through contiguity: separate versions of the self are made continuous and singular through how they are arranged alongside one another.

Mirror-vision as narrative is Massumi at his most phenomenological, shifting perilously close to the eidetic science developed in Husserl's research (in both *Logical Investigations* (1970) and continuing into *Ideas I* (1982)). In short, the experience of the reflection offers more towards understanding perception than what is seen in the mirror if this experience is to be considered "in the concrete fullness and entirety with which they figure... [in the] stream of experience" (Husserl 1931: 116). Reflection is

comprised of a series of adumbrations (to borrow another term from Husserl), and it is the perception of the image in the mirror that unifies it into a singular concept of the body.

Such an example of how the body recognises itself as an individual is markedly different from that specified in psychoanalysis, and in particular, the writing and research work on the mirror-stage developed by Jacques Lacan (1977). Lacan's work is focused on the development of the ego through a relationship with the mirror. In short, Massumi's mirror maintains the split and divided adumbrated image of the body, while Lacan's research talks of how the mirror consolidates the individual. It is a matter of division versus unity. As Lacan writes, the mirror-stage,

manifests the affective dynamism by which the subject originally identifies himself with the visual *Gestalt* of his own body: in relation to the still very profound lack of coordination of his own motility, it represents an ideal unity, a salutary *imago*; it is invested with all the original distress resulting from the child's intra-organic and relational discordance during the first six months, when he bears the signs, neurological and humoral, of a physiological natal prematuration. (1977, p. 15)

The infant child has an experience of the world that is complete and without frontier and therefore fragmented according to Lacan. The child does not recognise and acknowledge the "*c'est moi*" ("It is me!") of the ego. However, viewing its reflection in the mirror creates an image (*imago*) of the self, and a consolidation of the individual occurs. Through the mirror an infant becomes whole as an *ego*. While the mirror begins as a literal specular surface in his writing (1977, pp. 2-3, based on a 1936 lecture; 1977, p. 15, originally published in 1948), his later work described the mirror more metaphorically (1977, p. 234, presented in 1960), and Lacan extended this dynamic to everyday occurrences (and roots aggressivity in this inability for an individual to recognise themselves in others) as "the subject finds in this altered image of his body ... a tinge of hostility ... from the pleasure derived from meeting himself in the mirror, becomes when confrontating [*sic*] his fellow man an outlet for his most intimate aggressivity" (1977, p. 234).

What is worth noting is that the mirror-vision expressed by Massumi is wholly different from the creations of the individual (as ego) in Lacan. Lacan is discussing the role of recognition in allowing an individual to find themselves within the profoundly heterogeneous ternary of registers or orders: the

symbolic, the imaginary and the Real (see Sheridan in Lacan, 1973, pp. 279-280). But this ternary is very much an example of the type of framework Massumi argues has undermined research on the body by confining it to a gridlock (2002, p. 2). In short, in terms of Lacan, the body (image) is created through the mirror and then situates itself into a symbolic (signifying) register, while for Massumi the body *feels* itself into any semblance of a symbolic register (defined as apparatus, individuation, assemblage etc.) by experiencing this process. A feeling that is organised at the level of perception.

6.5.1.2 *Movement-vision*

Mirror-vision is only the first recognition-affect: the second is movement-vision. Movement-vision is not separate nor discrete from mirror-vision as both are affects of the recognition-assemblage. In fact, they are both phases of a similar process through which the body is narrativised on the mirror surface. However, the assemblage does not allow for the acceptance of this and therefore the movement is something—according to Massumi and tangentially the selfie research discussed above—not seen in the mirror. It is only when an individual sees themselves on screen, not reflected but recorded, that they experience Reagan’s jolt (or break in perception alluded to in Chapter 1, and comparable to the perceptual breaks presented in Section 3.6) that their movement becomes apparent.³⁹

However, this is where contradictions and problems start to occur within Massumi’s vocabulary and the research presented in Section 1.3 and Section 2.3. The selfie research seems to say that the movement in the mirror—being able to adjust oneself—is what leads to the potential offered by the novel selfie interface. Massumi is arguing that the mirror does not display movement, but, again, this is simply a result of how easy it is to be confused between the mirror and mirror-vision. Both movement-vision and mirror-vision occur in the mirror, however the complexity emerges when these two are separated and being seen on screen separates these two: again, “I recognise that person as they look like me!”

Now it is becoming apparent why perception in the novel selfie interface is so incredibly complex: because it is a mirror and it is not. When looking into the novel selfie interface specular reflection is

³⁹ While this discussion is concerned with the visual, it can anecdotally be attested that this same jolt is experienced when a recording of an individual’s voice is played back to them. One associate (and craft content creator) describes how they struggle at times to edit their videos and craft tutorials as the sound of their voice to be quite jarring.

practiced but this perception is met with a construction as an individual is looking at themselves experiencing themselves looking at themselves in the mirror. Suddenly this vocabulary becomes problematised as this phenomenon becomes impossible to articulate effectively and attempts to do so result in the run-on sentences such as the preceding one. The mirror-vision and the movement-vision do not become two phases of perception but wrestle for priority when looking into the novel selfie interface.

Massumi offers a vocabulary that attempts to navigate this difficulty; the virtual body (a body-without-an-image) becomes actualised (as a body-image). The body does not simply experience the body, rather the body experiences an actualisation of bodies that were once virtual as the bodies exist before they are actualised. However, because the perceptual modes of mirror- and movement-vision are always incomplete the process of actualisation of the body is incomplete, and thus becomes arrested *just short of actual*. Again, not the body itself but how it is perceived.

6.5.2 Short of actual

Short of actual is how the body exists for Reagan when he witnesses himself on a screen. The word short is important to note as it has two meanings in this context. First, it is short because it did not complete its objectives (just short of the finish line). Also, it is short in the sense of a short circuit; the (electrical) path that was intended suffered an impedance: a glitch. His position is real but “he can’t recognise” himself while simultaneously being aware that it is himself he sees (in Massumi, 2002, p. 55). In this regard, the image of the body that is short of actual can be understood as a topology. Topology here referring to the way in which (Deleuzoguattarian) bodies are interrelated and arranged as creases within a single plane of immanence or unitary substance. Massumi defines a topology as a figure of “continuous transformation of one geometrical figure into another” (1999, p. 306). Or, to borrow a metaphor from Serres (in Serres & Latour, 1995, p. 62): a topology is a fabric that is ironed out flat that has become folded, crumpled, shredded. It is still a singular piece of fabric, but the shreds and creases can be recognised as singular bodies. In other words, topology is a valuable way of accounting for how the singular allows for the multiple within itself. This topology is articulated as follows:

[Reagan] is in an in-between space composed of accumulated movements bled into one another and folding in upon the body. And he is in an in-between time after before but before after, in a gap of suspended animation following the preparation of the event but preceding its culmination. He is in the space of the duration of an ungraspable event. The feeling of the event washes through him (or that in-between of space and time), a wave or vibration that crests in the spoken lines. This time, the repetition of the lines effectively produces the event. But the event, as produced, is different. It has the reality of an acted event, a performance: short of actual. *The "short of actual" is expressed as a prolonging of the intensive in-betweenness of the event in the empirical world.* (2002, p. 57)

His use of event is not haecceitic, but rather evokes a phenomenology; the wave of vibrations and crests is a particularly phenomenological metaphor arguably developed through the writing of Eugène Minkowski (1936) but popularised within Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* where it is argued that "to determine the being of an image, we shall have to experience its reverberation[s]" (1958, p. xvi). The occurrence that is happening is quite plain, the body in being short of actual will always move towards actualisation. There is no distinction here—within Massumi's treatise—between the body on screen, the body Reagan is, and the body within the mirror; again, not different modes of perception but an assemblage of perception through which the body is experienced: various creases and crumbles in a singular piece of fabric.

It becomes an awareness of an inbetweenness that is suspended "following the preparation of the event and the preceding culmination" (2002, p. 57).

While this could be defined as an unfolding of the body or a process of actualisation, such articulations are not helpful as they tend to suggest a possible telos afforded to this event. The mirror and the screen do not cause a short within the actualisation of the body, as this actualisation is always short. The mirror and the screen—the seeing and being seen—reinforce the ontological jolt or break created through these affects within the assembling.

This extended discussion of mirror- and movement-vision does not account for the parameters of perception that allow for the perceptual haecceity alluded to in Section 6.2.1. But a close examination of a selfie can demonstrate these parameters in some detail. The following chapter presents this work.

6.6 Chapter conclusion: Towards a gestural assembling of the selfie

This chapter opened with two research questions:

1. How do the experiential phenomena of gesture become organised within the novel selfie interface?
2. What does this organisation reveal about how the body becomes desubjectified through the gesture in terms of this apparatus?

These questions were attended to through two concepts that were developed and adapted throughout this research and explicated here: assemblage and affect. However, while they formed a base it was noted how perception itself becomes the primary mode of organisation within how affect acts as a functor of any assemblage.

Two conclusions can then be drawn from this:

1. The selfie-assemblage impels the body to gesture as this assembling is perceptual.
2. The gestures both arrange and organise the body through the assemblage and affect as it is always short of actual

However, there is something which remains absent and that is the invisibility that is central to the process of desubjectification (a discussion notably absent in this chapter). This is in part due to the complex theoretical vocabulary of contending with affect here, however only once this vocabulary is mapped against a selfie can this desubjectification be demonstrated. Therefore, this chapter ends in *medias res* and should instead be considered as a framework for the work presented in the next chapter where the desubjectification of the selfie is finally demonstrated.

7 SELFIE: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF A DESUBJECTIFYING PERCEPTUAL HAECCEITY

Chapter 6 developed a framework of assemblage and affect that explores how the body-without-an-image—surging with the potential of affect—collapses into gesture. This theoretical framework was developed by showing how various components comprise an assemblage, and how the intensity (or volume) of these components—the affective stuff of their relations—result in this assemblage functioning as a block of bodying where body-without-an-image becomes body-image. As the image of the body is always short of actual it gestures and grasps forward, attempting to consolidate a complete body-image. However, an example of a selfie may better illustrate this assembling; demonstrating that this assembling is a gestural one and illustrated how this assembling desubjectifies the subject. This chapter reflects this process.

The selfie in question is perhaps not a typical one, partially. This example can be used to evidence the assembling of mirror, camera, and gesture (as interface) in terms of the parameters of perceptual haecceities through a mapping of three core concepts: quasi-corporeality, proprioception, and viscosity. These concepts allow to better contend with the perceptual haecceities of this assembling. Each concept will be explained in turn, but they illustrate the process in which the apparatus and the phenomenological experience of the apparatus dissolve into a gestural assembling.

However, the troubling strangeness of the image presented is implicit in a glitch occurring in how the device created the photo. A glitch is an interruption, malfunction, or disruption within a digital assembling (its etymological root is possibly derived “from the German *glitschig*, meaning ‘slippery’” (Benson-Allcott, 2013, p. 127)). However, for the moment, the assembling itself needs to be focused on, and the glitch (and its broader implications within this gestural assembling) will be discussed in terms of the burning mirror after this selfie has been examined. The burning mirror is a metaphor developed by Irigaray (1974) in response to the phallogocentric role disciplines such as psychoanalysis played in the development of a subject; it was a metaphor that methodologically endeavoured to disrupt or pierce an episteme and for this reason it can be understood as a mirror of glitches. Through this

metaphor it is investigated whether the glitch of this selfie manages to disrupt the desubjectified position of the subject in question.

Practically, this chapter is a case study of a single selfie that comprehensively demonstrates how a subject is desubjectified by an apparatus and queries whether the glitch manages to disrupt this process; regardless of the individual, intentions, or bodies involved.

7.1 Glitched selfie captured in Scotland: a close reading

Figure 7.1
Glitched selfie captured in Scotland



This image is of a selfie captured on the 2nd of June 2019 at some moment during the minute of 10.31. The image was captured with the digital camera of a Google Pixel 2 model smartphone. It was taken in Scotland just north of Loch Tulla at a roadside stop-off of the A28. The foreboding, overcast weather blankets the top half of the image confirming that the capacious extent of the day was cold, but not raining. The stop was a brief one, and therefore the selfie needed to be taken in a span of about fifteen minutes. This included finding a place and capturing the image. To note, during this period, seven images were taken. The image presented here was later edited through the application Instagram and posted on the 5th of September that same year (3 months later) with the caption “Remembering Scotland. Selfie. #selfiesunday #everydayisselvesunday 🤖 #glitch”. What is perhaps also important to note is that another selfie was posted on that day (the 2nd of June) that was taken during the same period.

These details may appear to be extraneous but if the fullness of this topological volume of relations is to be accounted for, a variety of details requires acknowledging. Methodologically, each detail presented above can be understood as a body in and of itself, resulting in the assemblage of assemblages and an incredibly involved and abstruse network of percepts and affects. While this is important, the objective here is not to note every specific component of this assembling; but enough detail is required to understand how various modes of perception emerge as haecceity.

From this picture of this selfie, there is evidence of the various components of the selfie-assemblage that have been mentioned throughout this research: mirrors, gestures, and affects.

First, the mirror. This mirror is not present within the figure; however, its effect can be deduced in the break in eyeline of the scowling, severe face. This break in eyeline is not incidental, but a result of the novel selfie interface conjugating camera and screen. The mirror here is not a specular surface, but a camera placed alongside a screen that is being fed data in real-time and therefore it is a mirror through practice: a discursive surface. While the history of portrait photography can in part be understood as a history of an individual looking into a lens (as discussed in Wilson, 2012), here the individual looking at the screen is a result of this particular apparatus: not an apparatus as gadget or tool, but an apparatus insofar this gadget or tool follows a form factor that is assembled through a series of developments (the need for an FFC for video calls, and ability to use this FFC outside of that function).

This screen/camera/eye-line ternary causes a misalignment that offers a reminder that the individual taking the selfie is looking at themselves on a screen. However, to consider this misalignment (or break) in terms of its affects three critical terms offer a guide that allows for the perception of this moment to be stepped through. The subject or individual does not only perceive themselves, but rather moves through a process of three orders of perception: quasi-corporeality, proprioception and viscosity.

7.1.1 Quasi-corporeality

Quasi-corporeality is the experience of being perceived and being aware of being perceived: “the superposition of the sum total of the relative perspectives in which the body has been implicated, as

object and subject, plus the passages between them” (Massumi, 2002, p. 58). It is very much an experience of being seen and knowing that you can be seen and how this realisation composes the body simultaneously as an object and a subject. For Massumi this creates an understanding of the body—involved between subject and object—where an “abstract *map* of transformation” (2002, p. 58) is realised (a topology). The experience of quasi-corporeality is an event and arguably situates the body along the axes of time and space. It is not so much the body itself intentionally saying “I am here”, but rather the quasi-corporeal is a realisation of the body as a body in time and place.

7.1.2 Proprioception

This quasi-corporeal order of perception runs adjacent to the second order: proprioception. This is the awareness of oneself an individual experiences not as subject nor object, but as a body that is situated (an aspect of phenomenology that is notably influential on Massumi and discussed in terms of Flusser in Chapter 5). Massumi describes it as a folding with the world outside of the body: an exteroception of the self of an individual as a subject in relation to an object as the “hardness underfoot as one looks into a mirror becomes a resistance enabling station and movement; the softness of a cat’s fur becomes a lubricant for the motion of the hand” (2002, p. 59). There are certainly echoes of Merleau-Ponty here. In its externality, proprioception of the body is an array of percepts encountering the tactile border of the skin, light in the eyes, scent in the nostrils and various other external stimuli. As Massumi writes “the same time as proprioception folds tactility in, it draws out the subject’s reactions to the qualities of the objects it perceives through all five senses, bringing them into the motor realm of externalizable response” (2002, p. 59).

But proprioception is not only the sensory reaction that an individual has to a body. This folding is what Merleau-Ponty deliberates on in his chapter “The spatiality of one’s own body and motility” (from *Phenomenology of Perception* (2012)) and fully realises in his posthumous essay on the “chiasm” (1964). As written: “The outline of [the] body is the frontier which ordinary spatial relations do not cross” (2012, p. 98). However, unlike the unifying and consolidating object of Merleau-Ponty’s body, the proprioception in Massumi’s thinking remains open. For Merleau-Ponty the “whole body is not an

assemblage of organs juxtaposed in space [as it is] undivided in possession of it and ... knows where each of [the] limbs [is] through a body-without-an-image in which all are included” (2012, pp. 98-99).

Proprioception can be understood as the primary mode of perception for phenomenologies of the body, however, in Massumi, proprioception is only one of multiple orders of perception.

7.1.3 Viscerality

The adjacent relationship between quasi-corporeality and proprioception is where the shift from percept becomes affect. This occurrence for Massumi is on the level of viscerality; “one that is deeper than the stratum of proprioception, in the sense that it is further removed from the surface of the skin” (2002, p. 60). This is where he most clearly posits that affect—in these instances—is a bodily intensity. At length:

The dimension of viscerality is adjacent to that of proprioception, but they do not overlap. The dimension of proprioception lies midway between stimulus and response, in a region where infolded tactile encounter meets externalizing response to the qualities gathered by all five senses. It performs a synthesis of those intersecting pathways in the medium of the flesh, thus opened to its own quasi-corporeality. Viscerality, though no less of the flesh, is a rupture in the stimulus-response paths, a leap in place into a space outside action-reaction circuits. Viscerality is the perception of suspense. The space into which it jolts the flesh is one of an inability to act or reflect, a spasmodic passivity, so taut a receptivity that the body is paralyzed until it is jolted back into action-reaction by recognition. (2002, p. 61)

There is something incredibly complex happening here. The viscerality of these orders of perception precedes mental, intentional thought and reads like a sinking of the percepts into the visceral flesh, not as a response to qualities gathered by all five senses, but more of a reflex or a resonance of these percepts. It seems that Massumi is saying this viscerality is percepts becoming affect. He calls this mesoperception (literally middle perception). It is not the exteroception nor the introspection but how they consolidate in partnership with one another: the “synesthetic sensibility: it is the medium where inputs from all five senses meet, across subsensate excitation, and become flesh together, tense and quivering” (2002, p. 62).

Although modes of perceptions—quasi-corporeal, proprioception, then viscerality—have been presented in this order this is not to indicate that each of these orders are occurring in an ordered fashion. Instead,

they occur simultaneously, in effect of one another, automatically. In the case of the selfie, these three orders do not occur consciously. The quasi-corporeal perception and the resultant, simultaneous, and adjacent proprioception and viscosity all repeat constantly. Also, what is important to note is that these orders of perception are by no means insensate: the orders are all means of sensation, and this sensation is a means of being affected into the assemblage that simultaneously allows for the possibility of this assemblage. The potential of the body-without-an-image cascades into image through quasi-corporeal perception, proprioception, and viscosity.

However, as said above, this is only a critical vocabulary used to expand a discussion on affect. At those instances of body-image it is imperative to return to the assemblage and its qualities because there can be no fixity or stasis. The body-image finds place not in the assemblage as another part but instead as a permutation of *new* relationships.

And what does this result in? It results in gesturality. The body within the assemblage is obligated to action and impelled to move. There is a sense of protention and the very material act of grasping the device before you—that embodied process of comprehension—becomes as much an action of embodied knowledge as it does an articulation of the possibility of the body and the possibility of the relations of the assemblage. The body-image is not perceived as it is perception that leads to this moment. Instead, the very possibility of perception emerges between the body *without image* and the assemblage it encounters.

Unlike the experience of an analogue mirror, the instance of the selfie results in various orders of perception occurring simultaneously. The individual sees themselves in the mirror here, and they see themselves on screen there. It becomes an event in which the body is neither subject nor object but quasi-corporeal. The body is situated in Scotland, and the hand is situated against the device, and the eye line is broken against the novel selfie interface. This event wedges itself between the object and the subject and the bodying continues to fold the subject not only into the landscape of Scotland but also into the apparatus as various relations are formed between these components: the day was cold, and a glove needed to be removed to operate the camera, the device was enclosed in a case making the

manipulation of the camera button awkward. To note: what is happening here is not only seeing but complete, embodied, synesthetic perception. These sensations are not conscious but pre-individual and as this folding commences—at some instance—there is a realisation that within these folds the possibility of the selfie emerges into conspicuity. At that instance the selfie became possible because there was a human body-body, a phone-body, and a place-body. It was not so much that the body was arranged into the role of a selfie-taker, but rather the actualising of the body-without-an-image into body-image—just short—led to the realisation that the selfie had become possible in that moment. A gesture could occur.

This is peculiar and interesting, and a component of the selfie-assemblage: the mirror is part of the assemblage, the screen is part of the assemblage, and the distance created through these components is as well. Part of this assemblage is simultaneously the impetus to investigate the mirror and the reaction when it is impossible to do so due to the perceptual breaks caused by the disparity of the device (as discussed in Section 3.6). It is in this moment were the body-without-an-image needs to actualise itself within this assembling and become-image. Not picture nor photograph; but a sensible production of extensions and qualities that allow for the body to perceive and be perceived from the same source: an obligation to look at an individual looking at an individual.

With this, a second component of this assemblage becomes realised: the body. An aspect of the selfie assemblage is the body that is revealed in its gesturing. Not just a single gestural unit, but the tension of the process of gesturality rapidly intervolving as a series of adumbrations between the body-without-an-image and the body-image. This results in the implicit gesturality of the selfie as what is occurring is both a performative act and a situatedness of the body (De Rosa & Strauven, 2020, p. 235). Or, put another way, a body is here, and the body must gesture because it is here. It is the action of a body positioned in a particular time and place—2nd of June 2019 at some instance during the minute of 10.31 just north of Loch Tulla, Scotland, at a roadside stop off the A28—and these all act as parameters dialling and adjusting the specifics of this situation: the haecceity of this moment collides with the selfie-assemblage.

However, this gesture is not only a movement of the body that expresses or articulates some meaning (as Flusser contends (2014, p. 4)). It is a process in which the body was positioned so that a particular

action could be executed. The device being used was a smartphone, and it became the *manipulandum* of the body. There were adjustments on both sides as the device was adjusted causing the body to be adjusted causing the device to be adjusted and so on; both consciously and not. To note, this is not a question of performativity (defined here as a movement of a desubjected subject) or intentionality (defined here as a movement of absolute agency), but the formation of a relationship: an affect. A complex relationship is formed between the device and the body, perception and action. This becomes a component of the selfie-assemblage and the gestural becomes part of the selfie-assemblage through affect. As demonstrated in example of the wasp and the orchid: an assembling is not the meeting of a wasp and an orchid, it is how aspects of the components of the wasp and the orchid experience a becoming.

Conclusively, what is present here is not a body and a device. Instead, what is shown here is a body-without-an-image being realised as a body-image through assemblage and its various perceptual haecceities all co-functioning like creases on a once-ironed piece of fabric. While the literature on the selfie has argued that the selfie is a social-media photograph, or a networked-image, or a process of self-realisation; all these assertions are arguably the result of a tension between an assemblage and the ability of this gestural assembling to give body image. The selfie can indeed be many things, but all these things result through the bodying experienced when the body-without-an-image encounters this assemblage. Each of the unique definitions of the selfie are not efforts to distinguish individual categories, and instead the very fact there are so many possible definitions is evidence that the distinction between body, device, network, self, mirror, gesture and so on are simply repeating and reterritorialising differences in degree. In short, the selfie is not the result of a body's ability to pose, take photographs, share images, or engage with the digital. Instead, the body's ability to actualise as an image of itself that takes photographs, share images, pose, or engages with the digital is an image of the body that can be called a selfie.

Assemblage theory and discussions of affect and the possible perceptual haecceities provide an invaluable methodological framework for analysing this complex volume of relations if for no other reason than to articulate the complexities of this moment. But such a reading is incomplete. In Chapter

2 and Chapter 3 the mirror was defined as apparatus and deemed invisible through the machinations of this. In Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, it was demonstrated how the (human) body can be made invisible through gestures as repeated and recognised gestures become paradigmatic (in the case of the bricklayer or the chimpanzee). But the analysis of this selfie has leaned more into the phenomenological dimension of this experience and a question of which apparatus is being made invisible has been left fallow. Ultimately, what is apparent here is that it is not the invisibility of the mirror nor gesture that is of concern, but rather another invisibility that can only now be given attention; there is another example of invisibility implicit here that is not often recognised within selfie-practice: the digital.

7.2 The glitch, the body, and its postdigital implications

The glitch needs to be noted here. Of course, this glitch is ostensibly not common to the selfie; with some arguing that the removal of glitches is part of the selfie process (Warfield, 2017b). It is also not entirely sure what caused it to happen when this selfie was captured. Of the thousands taken since, this is the only image created displaying such a glitch. It is a glitch *because* it was unexpected and interrupting. The image was stored in memory and as it was saved (or written) bands of violent colour were strewn across its bottom half.

This glitch indicates two things.

Firstly, it reveals the pixelization of the selfie evidencing that the image is what Flusser calls a technical image: not a surface but a mosaic assembled from particles (2011, p. 6). To note, this glitch was not present on the digital mirror screen, and it only occurred after the image was captured. However, the information broke down within its array.

Second, the glitch also evidences the complex relationship between the body and the digital (cf. Benson-Allott, 2013; Cascone, 2000; also, Menkman's *Glitch Studies Manifesto* (2009/2010)) and a glitch can make the digital visible. This is important as a digital glitch is argued to have the capacity to derail perception "and inject the microtemporal misfirings of the computer into our subjective awareness" (Denson, 2020, p. 2). While the selfie is not an explicitly digital gesture (as it is not a gesture that

interacts intentionally with the digital), the digital is vital to the act of selfie-taking, and selfie-takers actively engage in unintentional digital activity. In other words, the digital is automatic or transparent (to borrow from Flusser or Bolter and Grusin, see Section 3.5). This glitch resulted in something occurring not common to selfie practice: it placed the digital on display.

Articulated in another fashion: this glitch is another body within this assemblage. The unexpected colours are percepts that became actualised as a further set of affects. This moment of glitch makes this selfie *postdigital* as the digital is only visible through an irruption of a membrane or veil discussed by Pepperell and Punt (2000) and Cascone (2000). However, what is important for now is that the selfie is partly digital; and the digital is a constituent part of the selfie assemblage and therefore it is undeniable that the transition from body-without-an-image to body-image is influenced by an invisible digital apparatus (made apparent here through the glitch).

Thus, the selfie is a gestural assemblage—an assemblage between the apparatus and the perceiving body—that provides the body with image. Image defined here as an extensity to perceptions; haecceity of perception specific to the individual and still repeated throughout various assemblies. In terms of the interface discussed in Chapter 1, the mirror then becomes a crucial moment in this assemblage; not in terms of how it produces an authentic or accurate image of the body, not in terms of how it allows an individual to see and situate their gesture, not in terms of how it results in a Lacanian development of the Ideal-I, or even a Massumian affective movement of mirror-vision: the mirror here is essential because of how it organises these various images.

These images need to be briefly recounted before a note on postdigital resistance is made, and this thesis is finally concluded.

7.3 The images of the selfie and their productive invisibilities

Three images of the selfie interface are worth noting

First, the technical image: the one dictated and described by Flusser, that is, an image created by apparatus; not only due to the mechanisms and electronics of the camera or FFC but also through the

codes and programmes dictating its use. This image is the most recognisable and easily observed. The selfie is “a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website” (Oxford Academic (Oxford University Press), 2013) as per its most denotative definition. The selfie is a photograph as it can be defined exclusively in such terms.

Second, the image in the digital mirror. This image is wholly more complicated. It is a technical image as the mirror (as evidenced in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3) is an apparatus. But it is also not recognised as such through its invisibility. Because this image allows an individual to witness their movements and situate their body, it promotes discussions of authenticity and accuracy (within the literature), psychoanalytic discussions of the creation of the self or ego, or philosophical discussions of movement and mirror-vision. In that an individual can see themselves in the mirror, the body is also witness to this act of perception and then recognises the body as such but does so at the expense of seeing the apparatus.

Thirdly, the image of the digital is grasped in hand and attended to through a rhetoric of natural gestures. This image is not pictorial in the way a photographic or specular image can be understood as pictorial. It is an image in a sense it is delineated in terms of various perceptual haecceities. The device is held, and this grasping alleviates any complications of perception. Through this complex comprehension, the device becomes removed as a functor of this bodying and is instead a point around which an entire perceptual and paradigmatic series of gestures emerge. There is no wasp nor orchid in the wasp-orchid assembling. There is no hand nor device here: just an image of their relationship.

Yet, through all these levels and categories of image, each defined and discussed throughout this thesis, that initial break of eye line still cannot seem to be consolidated. While it is nothing but a small distance, a slight perceptual interstice between the screen and the camera, the perceptual break produced by it is a chasm. And within this chasm, the photograph, mirror and haecceities of affect become readily apparent but completely unseen. This is the fundamental difficulty of the selfie.

7.4 The limitations of glitch as a postdigital form of resistance

This perceptual break is undoubtedly a glitch. To borrow Cascone's description, glitches are "bugs, application errors, system crashes, clipping, aliasing, distortion" (2000, p. 13) and other unexpected eruptions that pop and crepitate from the machine. The glitch here is one that is drawn in the distance between the screen and the FFC that allows the screen to both operate as a mirror in practice and fail as a mirror in execution. Failure, in the research of Cascone (cf. 2000; Cascone & Jandrić, 2021) and others, is a vital element of glitch, and it has become understood as a means of resistance to digital ubiquity. In a 2021 interview with postdigital theorist Petr Jandrić, Cascone discusses how "the underlying electronic circuits [and] algorithms/computer code remains hidden from the audience [and] causes mystification" (2021, p. 574). But a glitch operates as an agent of demystification. This sentiment is repeated throughout the literature (Benson-Allott, 2013; Cascone, 2000; Denson, 2020, also, Menkman's Glitch Studies Manifesto (2009/2010)).

Consider glitch for a moment in terms of Irigaray's burning mirror (*miroir ardent*). The burning mirror (sometimes called the burning lens or the burning glass) is a large convex lens used to focus and concentrate the rays of the sun into a specific area. For Irigaray, in the light of the burning mirror, "in the optical failure, the impossibility of gazing on their encounters in flames, the split (*schize*) founding and structuring the difference between experience and transcendental (especially phallic) eminence will burn also" (1974, p. 145). Irigaray was writing in response to psychoanalysis and the phallogocentric nature of its definitions and the impossibility of defining "women" in such frameworks (1974, pp. 21-24; Burke, 1987, p. 288). The mirror, for Irigaray, was "charged with sending *man's* [emphasis added] image back to him" (1974, p. 51)—the mirror ostensibly being both a metaphor for psychoanalysis (citing Freud and others) and the mirror itself as apparatus. However, in the context of this thesis, the *miroir ardent* is a powerful metaphor of how technologies and discourse can restrict access to them while simultaneously offering resistance. The burning mirror is a mirror of glitches, and this burning is argued to be liberating.

The glitch in terms of postdigital research is a burning mirror: fecund with revolutionary potential as the glitch can dismantle the ubiquity of computation and reveal the automation of these machines. In a manner similar to how the mirror-apparatus is prey to the myth of invisibility in how it is fettered through various knowledges, discourses, and dominant strategic functions: the digital is as well. A plethora of research has contended on this myth of invisible computing (Emerson, 2014; Greenfield, 2006; Shanbaum, 2020), and it is by and large discussed in terms of how computing today became ubiquitous (not unlike the rise of the ubiquity of specular surfaces discussed in Section 1.3.1). Although the myth of invisibility pervading these discussions is largely rhetorical (Shanbaum, 2020, p. 115) and fettered through ephemeral metaphors such as that of the “cloud” (Hu, 2015), such metaphors of this rhetoric is enunciated as statements (*énoncé*) through the perceptive and affective capacities of gesturality.

But this is not wholly the case, and perception needs to be imported into these conversations. The glitch of the selfie—in the case of Figure 7.1, or in the chasm and perceptual break of the screen and the FFC—are reconciled, ironed out, and smoothed over. These glitches have undoubtedly lost a large contingent of their revolutionary potential “when corporate media appropriated [their] stylistic visual and sonic signifiers” (Cascone & Jandrić 2021, p. 570)⁴⁰ and through how they were appropriated by aesthetic forms such as data moshing. It would be a perception in its haecceity, inevitably, that both acknowledged and rescinded any potential for the glitch to pierce the veil or membrane of digital ubiquity. If a glitch is a point of resistance, this resistance is made invisible in how the complex relationship with perception has been assembled through our devices through gesture. In other words, the invisibility of the digital is not only that which is said and unsaid, but that which is expressed through the grasping and gesturing of the device through movements such as the selfie.

Desubjectification of the subject, therefore, is not only in what is said or unsaid through gestural practices. Desubjectification is a result of how the gestural assembling of the selfie is a gestural assembling of perception itself.

⁴⁰ see West & Elderkin (2009) for an example of this.

7.5 The gestural assembling of the postdigital into the selfie

This, ultimately, is how gesture—through its productive edicts—is one of the most limiting dynamics within digital technologies: especially in those where the digital is not readily apparent. While this lack of digital visibility (through hidden codes or specific form factors) is not seen in how it is presented, it also becomes invisible in how it is held and grasped as perception within (post)digital gestures such as the selfie account for these glitches. If the selfie is a technique of the body or the transformed gesture of the desubjectified digital subject, this learning and transformation account for glitches and those moments that glitches momentarily erupt and wither away.

This is because of how gestures such as the selfie promote the invisibility of the apparatus within their assembling: not invisible because it is *not* seen, but invisible because it *is* seen; seen by the hand, the eye, and the volume of relations that inculcate them. There is no denying that digital gestures are not human (Norman, 2010), that digital technologies are not socially nor politically neutral, that our relationship with our devices is a ubiquitous one lashed through metaphors of the cloud and similar sentiments; the knowledge of this is consolidated through gesture and through this ongoing gesturality, it can become primarily ignored at the level of how it is perceived.

The selfie produces an image of the body, and the digital parameters of this body are made invisible.

The following section concludes the work of this thesis by restating the conclusions and findings of each chapter and synthesising these points. It also presents some limitations of the selected methodological processes used throughout and offers some avenues for further research.

8 CONCLUSION: THE GESTURAL ASSEMBLING OF THE SELFIE

8.1 Summary of conclusions

The research presented in this thesis resulted from looking at the mirror of the selfie more closely while paying particular attention to gesture. The mirror created by the high-resolution front-facing camera of the contemporary smartphone not only allowed an individual to perceive themselves when the device that was held before them (creating an interface) but resulted in a perceptual collapse into gesture. This difficulty is because the individual and their body require a gestural organisation or bearing before taking the selfie. This thesis ultimately and demonstrably showed that this bearing is a perceptual one and the organisation of the body is a perceptual organisation. Therefore, the term "selfie" was conceptualised as a quilting point: but not just a point of discursive meaning, but a point of relationships as this perceptual organisation of the body was assembled through a variety of affects. What is a unique contribution is how these affects organised the apparatus: the apparatus of the camera, the mirror, gesture, the digital etc. These efforts resulted in three conclusions about the selfie that are presented here, explicitly:

1. The novel selfie interface impels the body to gesture.
2. This gesture is a result of an encounter between the body-without-an-image and the novel selfie interface.
3. This encounter can be understood as gesture: a process that arranges and territorialises body-image as a constitutive part of the apparatus through affect.

This research was a response to the invisibility implicit within selfie-taking, invisibility made apparent in the literature surrounding the selfie. However, invisibility was shown to be a myth that was perpetuated through various discourses, knowledges, assumptions of light as truth, and various other factors discussed in Chapter 1, Chapter 2, and Chapter 3. It was argued that for an apparatus to operate effectively, this invisibility needed to be perpetuated not only at the level of discourse but instead through the body itself. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 examined these movements and dispositions of the body through gesture. Firstly, by examining gesture as a phenomenon, and secondly by illustrating how gesture has changed from being invisible to becoming human by drawing a line from the launch of the

iPhone in 2007 to a viral video of a chimpanzee where the ape was said to be human in their movements. The objective of drawing this line was to show how quickly movements of the body can be recognised and perceived as human movements within this volume of relations. This demonstrated that the recognition of gesture is not perceptual because it is seen, but perceptual because the body seeing these movements understands or believes that they can do them.

This volume of relations was ultimately shown to be an assemblage of perceptual affects in which a virtual body-without-an-image attempts to resolve to body-image but always stays just short of actual. This was presented in Chapter 6. This is what causes the gestural collapse: the body grasps in an attempt to comprehend the device, the various lines of sight, the surrounding affects. The capturing of the photo is perhaps a means of consolidating this. However, in Chapter 7, the mirror was shown to be not a meaningless surface but a burning one.

8.2 How these findings expand theories of apparatus and assemblage and offer an appropriate background to build further research into the selfie

Through the case of the selfie, this thesis is ultimately theory building. It notably extends theories of the apparatus and discussions surrounding the gesture and apparatus. By extending these theories through phenomenology, this thesis demonstrated that a gesture does not occur within an apparatus or outside of an apparatus. Instead, it is demonstrated that gesture is implicit in the creation of the apparatus. This ultimately problematises both Agamben and Flusser's respective work on gesture and the apparatus. In terms of Agamben's theory, the idea that the mobile phone "reshaped" (2009, pp. 15) our gesture is inaccurate as this implies an existing set of gestures—an existing vocabulary—that somehow morphed and changed. Instead, the desubjectification of the subject in terms of the mobile phone is not a result of reshaped gestures but rather the result of new perceptual haecceities that constitute the apparatus. In terms of Flusser's assertion that gestures are non-causal, it was inferred that such an assumption also does not account where gestures come from and cannot be argued away with a discussion of intent as Flusser attempts to do. While Flusser's research is reposed on notions of paradigmatic gestures, the case of the iPhone and the chimp, the examination of the origins of the selfie, and the analysis of the selfie in

Chapter 7 illustrate that it is not the gestures themselves that are paradigmatic but the lines of perception that define them.

Ultimately, this research is an argument for returning to apparatus theory and its creation of the subject to examine the complex role of gesture in this desubjectifying process. Again: this is not a question of how the apparatus dictates gesture, but how the subject is itself gestural.

8.3 Some considered limitations of this thesis and considerations to account for them in further research projects

The limitations of this study are found in the narrow theoretical line drawn from apparatus to gesture, to assemblage and affect. While various criticisms of such frameworks were both introduced and discussed throughout, and conceptual clarity was endeavoured to make conceptual categories clear through some novel linkages of various interdisciplinary concepts, it is acknowledged that this could possibly result in some theoretical ambiguities. However, every step has been taking to avoid any fallacious reasoning on the part of this thesis. Ultimately, theories of apparatus, phenomenology, assemblage, and affect are prone to misgivings and difficulties. A considerable effort was put into not only clarifying the auspice of each theory but also being sure to contextualise and map these theories against the selfie throughout.

Furthermore, largely theoretical work could be accused of making ineffective or implausible claims to reality. However, all efforts were made to never examine theory exclusively but always read it through existing literature and a variety of case studies and pertinent examples. The primary means of contending with this limitation was using the researcher's own selfie and selfie practice as a site of consideration and example. This could be considered a limitation in and of itself as a lot of weight was placed on the selfie reproduced in Figure 1.1 and Figure 7.1; a selfie that, for all intents and purposes, is not common. But the particulars and troubling strangeness of this selfie—the glitch and the experience of the moment—is also what allowed for the selfie (and its interface) to be considered in a novel way.

The final limitation is in focus. The selfie is commonly understood as a networked image with a veritable online presence. An entire dimension of the selfie is by and large absent from this thesis. Ideas of being online, the network, identity and the political ramifications of the body are missing. A stark

limitation of this thesis is that the body throughout has remained a neutral site, with only a minor consideration given to the topic of race. But questions of gender, class and various other bands of societal stratification were not specially considered. This could be viewed as a limitation as, for some, the selfie is indeed a gendered means of production (see Abidin, 2016; Barnard, 2016; Losh, 2015). But this theoretical framework is a groundwork upon which such discussions can hopefully be built in the future.

8.4 Methods for generalising this research into other areas of study

The selfie was the case of focus in this thesis, but this research offers itself to be readily generalised into the more significant discipline of (post)digital gestural media practices. Notably, this research was conducted and written up during the height of the (at the time of writing, still ongoing) global pandemic of coronavirus disease. During this period, the digital mirror and the accompanying interstices between the camera and screen proliferated across video calling platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, and various others. Ironically, during this period, these platforms became some of the few places where the face could be readily shown, as the face in public needed to be covered with another screen (the mask). Zoom—a proprietary eponym for video calling in general—resulted in a post-mask selfie. Like the novel selfie interface, it is also subject to the mirror and the camera and therefore determined by the gesture of the individual.

Another development of this digital mirror proliferated in various social media more readily: some worth mentioning (but not examined) include live streaming platforms such as Twitch and social media applications such as TikTok. Both platforms are explicitly developed around the ability to ostensibly watch others gesture. In the case of Twitch, the process of livestream is less about the stream itself and more about the social interaction implicit with these gestures. In comparison, a large segment of TikTok is comprised of performances (notably repeated dance choreographies). There is a novel relationship between the performer, audience, and scenic topology implicit in both platforms and both are centred around a digital mirror. However, what makes those platforms unique is both are

predicated on video and not still images (opposed to the selfie). The theories and considerations made in this thesis would benefit individuals researching those platforms.

Also, the notion of the body-without-an-image and its attempt to consolidate into body-image would be invaluable for those working in immersive media (research and practice). Within this discipline, questions of immersion and embodiment are common, and there is undoubtedly valuable room to consider the body-without-an-image and how it becomes realised in body-image in relation to a VR headset-apparatus or augmented reality devices such as the mobile phone or mixed-reality technologies. There has already been some preliminary work on this front within a burgeoning international and interdisciplinary pilot project titled FEVR (Field Experience in Virtual Reality) between Coventry University's (CU) Centre for Postdigital Cultures and Nelson Mandela University's (NMU) Department of Geosciences. The project hopes for engagement with pedagogic development and hands-on Earth Science education in South African universities and schools using 360 cameras. The work presented in this study on perceptions of the body has been instrumental in understanding how students envision themselves in these online spaces.

8.5 Recommendations for further study

Some preliminary work and further study have already begun. Some of those projects will be mentioned here as well as future projects. These projects are still in their infancy and still require considerable work to be fully realised.

The research published in this thesis has been disseminated in various journals and at some conferences; not the central thesis, but other ancillary study conducted during the writing of this dissertation. Further work needs to be done on this front. Notably, expansions into work on the mirror in what Vivian Sobchack calls the screen-sphere. Some preliminary investigations (presented at The International Screen Studies Conference, 2021) have been conducted into what happens to the screen-sphere during a global pandemic as conceptions of space and the relationship to screens has fundamentally changed in the past year. Also, some of the theorisings around Flusser's work on gesture

has been published through the Flusser Archives; however, there is more space for development on this front. Especially concerning gestural vocabularies and dictionaries (and their implicit limitations).

Also, while the selfie was investigated closely in this thesis, work on other gestures require consideration. While the FFC and the mirror was undoubtedly a centre for this project, gestures not implicitly motivated, dictated, nor expressed through the FFC can also be investigated through the gestural assembling of the subject. Notably, some initial research has been conducted on the gesture of repair and its desubjectifying processes. The hypothesis behind this research is based on the premise that the contemporary mobile phone function under a veneer of planned obsolescence. This, therefore, creates trash. As Greg Kennedy writes in his book *An Ontology of Trash*, “the very word [trash] is philosophically objectionable, academically indecent [, b]ut precisely its distasteful connotations make trash the mandatory subject of modern ontology” (Kennedy, 2007, p. xvi) the reason is because trash “is supposed to be nothing, a nonexistent; it is supposed to lack whatever legitimates the presence of an object in our world... [yet] obviously, and worrisomely, it is, and so remains, usually for a great many years” (Kennedy, 2007, p. x). However, what this also means is that trash becomes *a constituent part of the ontology of the mobile phone*. It is designed to be trash, and, obligates the phone’s owner to create more trash. The gesture of repair is supplanted by a gesture of disposal: a gesture for creating trash. And trash becomes an existential problem. The research will explore the device’s planned obsolescence in economic and pragmatic terms, and then examine the Right to Repair movement as a means of resistance to this obsolescence. Finally, returning to ontology, I hope to add to discussions of ownership and what it means in terms of gesture and what this means in terms of individuation, alienation, and gesture’s central role in the human experience.

Lastly, in terms of the work of Flusser, the concept of the technical image is of great interest. However, it is the image that requires revisiting. The research conducted in this thesis did not pay particular attention to this image and the parameters, qualities, and potential of the image of the technical image require investigation. In other words, the more aesthetic attributes of the technical image within a telematic society. A postdigital investigation of the technical image is predicated on the technologies and systems that allow for the existence of these images and how these images appear. While glitch—as an

aesthetic category—was mentioned, there is more work to be done if a line or vector is drawn from the gesturing individual and the images they create. These exercises are envisioned to be more practice-based through a series of creative coding exercises.

8.6 Closing remarks on the gestural assembling of the selfie

It is incredible to think how the word "selfie" managed to get so many bodies to move in such a specific way. It is also remarkable how the interstice between the camera and the screen resulted in such a complex unfolding and continuously developing gestural volume of relations. It is a single word and seven millimetres of distance; however, this space produced a global phenomenon across which various discourses were slewed and perpetuated.

To conclude this thesis, it is worth turning to the closing section of Michel Foucault's title, *The Order of Things* and his metaphor of the face drawn in the sand. The book is a thesis on organisation via representations, and Foucault demonstrates in this archeology how the very concept of "Man" (not a human or an individual, but a discursive arrangement of knowledges through various power strategies: an apparatus) was created through various movements and lines of both enunciation and visibility. He concludes his text by showing the ephemeral nature of the image of Man as he writes (1970b, p. 387):

If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility—without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises—were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.

This metaphor is undoubtedly striking and, in many ways, an uncharacteristically hopeful thought. But it is perhaps also Foucault at his weakest: the potential and extensity of the metaphor are lost in its evocative imagery of the silt and the winds and the tides. The apparatus cannot be washed away so quickly as it is shared and drawn. The role of gesture in this thesis and its desubjectifying process complicates how any apparatus is encountered or interfaced with and what this means in terms of the subject. Various beliefs and understandings are knitted through the role gesture plays in its creation in terms of the selfie. For this reason, the fleeting features of the face in the sand are transmitted into the

body, and the image of the face itself is not essential. Instead, it is time to ignore the face and its attributes and turn to the hands that drew those features in the break of the saltwater.

Conclusively, the selfie is not only an image of oneself taken by oneself but a gestural assembling of a subject; a desubjectifying process at the level of perception.

[end].

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APPENDIX A: HILTON SELFIE AND REBUTTALS

Figure 1.2
Paris Hilton's tweet

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Note. Hilton, 2017, [~/Paris Hilton/status/932325973046984712](#)

Figure 1.4
Mr Bean example

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Note. Yash, 2017, [~/yash_somayya/status/932399596956995584](#)

Figure 1.3
Bill Nye example

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Note. miXerone, 2017, [~/i/status/932325973046984712](#)

Figure 1.5
The Fresh Prince example

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Note. Moor, 2017, [~/Uncle_Malik/status/932388857949011970](#)

Figure 1.6

Madonna example

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Figure 1.7

George Harrison example

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Note. MONSIEUR ✕, 2017, [~/sergiomad69/status/932351050832580608](#)

Note. Ger, 2017, [~/geomac24/status/932361802297630720](#)

Figure 1.8

Kramer example

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Figure 1.9

Sabrina the Teenage Witch example

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Note. Seinfeld Current Day, 2017, [~/Seinfeld2000/status/932374259992793089](#)


Note. freshtwofresh , 2017, [~/freshtwofresh/status/932376353311248387](#)

Figure 1.10

Jordan Doww example

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Note. Doww, 2017, `~/JordanDoww/status/932414598262669318`

Figure 1.12

Ginger the Cat example

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Note. Larry the Cat, 2017, `~/Number10cat/status/932742808364036097`

Figure 1.11

Carlos Grande example

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Note. Granda, 2017, `~/abc7carlos/status/932665948368076800`

Figure 1.13

Joseph Byron example

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Note. the holiest moliest guacamoliest, 2017, `~/space_orphan/status/932333445988040704`

Figure 1.14

Unknown figure example

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Figure 1.15

Robert Cornelius example

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Note. iLoveRoses9, 2017, [~/love_roses9/status/932327488058986496](#)

Note. Schiattarella, 2017, [~/alwaysfabiolous/status/932591422611578882](#)

Figure 1.16

Queen Victoria example

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Figure 1.17

Leonardo da Vince example

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Note. Hazard, 2017, [~/BearlyDoug/status/932463024111280128](#)

Note. Krishnan, 2017, [~/kalkrishnan83/status/932382163168669696](#)

Figure 1.18

Vincent van Gogh example

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Note. Arnett, 2017, ~/MODEangel/
status/932349727013724160

Figure 1.19

Jesus of Nazareth example

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Note. Peter, 2017, ~/MethodMamba/
status/932500229131325441