Performing the Perfect on Instagram: Applied Theatrical Interventions with Young Women

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I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my original work and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, to any other university for the award of any other degree.

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Abstract

The central purpose of this research is to examine what is unearthed when applied theatre workshops are used to explore pressures on young women to perform 'the perfect' (McRobbie, 2020) on Instagram. The perfect, as defined by feminist cultural theorist, Angela McRobbie, suggests a kind of entrapment for predominantly white, middle class young women, in which they must work hard to portray online, beautified faces, sculpted bodies, stylish spaces and sparkling social lives (Ibid). Drawing on the outcomes of an applied theatre workshop project with white, working class young women, this research reconfigures how this entrapment plays out in daily life and examines a certain sense of dissatisfaction.

My findings indicate that young women are routinely gripped by 'expressive stasis': an inability to post for fear of not meeting the gendered and classed terms of Instagrammability. In turn, this causes young women to invest in individualised mental labour of staging a future perfect self, which alienates them from the materiality of their perceived 'imperfect' bodies. Worryingly, this phenomenon is set against a cultural backdrop where popular feminist resilience languages promote intensely individualised coping methods (Ibid; Banet-Weiser, 2018). This interdisciplinary research positions applied theatre contexts as capable of offering new insights and enabling embodied disturbance of the inevitability of these overlapping media languages of the 'perfect-imperfect-resilience' (McRobbie, 2020).

Methodologically, I examine the outcomes of this research through a combination of discursive and affective traditions. Through analysis of the theatrical outcomes of 're-worlding' Instagram, I observe the power of performance to enable participants to re-awaken corporeal perception in ways that interrogate the discourses of expressive stasis and the perfect-imperfect. This thesis also attests to the potential of embodied modes of interpersonal engagement to interfere with notions of resilient individuality that undergird young women's experiences of their mediated social worlds.

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Introduction

Between 2015 - 2018 I worked at a school for young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) in Liverpool. During this time, I observed a series of occurrences that sparked my interest and prompted a line of inquiry culminating in this thesis: How might applied theatrical interventions be helpful in examining the pressures on young women to stage perfect performances of the self on Instagram in times when they are receiving contradictory messages around femininity and feminism. I begin this chapter by outlining the significance of these early influences before moving on to locate the fieldwork and the theoretical framework undergirding the analysis in this thesis.

The first instance of influence transpired in the high school carpark. Four girls from two different classes had left the school building, and as teaching assistants, it was the responsibility of my colleague and I to usher them back to their classes. While gathering outside, one of the girls spat out a glob of phlegm, to which my colleague responded 'Don't do that Alice,[1] be a lady!' I winced – while as a fellow teaching assistant I was on board with challenging behaviour such as spitting, as a feminist the archaic adage 'be a lady' seemed more appropriate for an 18th century finishing school, rather than the EBD setting we found ourselves in. Before I could launch into an internal debate over whether I should reframe this directive – risking undermining my colleague whose 18 years at the school made my six months pale in comparison – Alice retorted 'Don't call me a lady, I'M A FEMINIST!' While this might now be a much more commonplace assertion for a 16 year old girl, seven years ago Alice's proud declaration of her feminism took me by surprise; this politicised comeback struck me as clever, amusing and like a small cause for celebration. Though, with the view to diffuse the situation, I opted for an internal happy dance and then, when Alice added to the theatrics of her previous assertion by glaring at my colleague and stating, 'I want to go back inside now', I agreed to escort her back to class.

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[1] Alice is a pseudonym given to protect the anonymity of this young person.

On our way to class my sense of celebration was abruptly curtailed when we were met by two boys from Alice's year group, one of which greeted her by forcefully putting his arm around her shoulders and pressing his body weight onto hers, causing her to lose her footing and restricting her from standing upright. Whilst getting Alice in his grip the boy looked at her and said 'Alice, you little slag, have you got your red bra on today?' As I launched into reprimanding the boy – causing him to simultaneously bite his tongue and release her – my eyes scanned between him and Alice. She was laughing and looking affectionately towards him, seemingly unbothered by his malicious and derogatory remarks. This time there was no rebuttal from Alice, no exertion of a feminist awareness of how she should or should not be spoken to.

Feeling uneasy with this encounter I reported it through the online system that tracked the students' daily behaviour – a standard procedure for an incident of this nature. As the day continued, I heard through the school rumour mill that the night before Alice had posted a picture on Instagram in which her vest top strap was pulled down on one side, showing that she was wearing a red bra. My role as a teaching assistant required me to move between a variety of year groups which enabled me to discern first-hand the extent to which Alice's Instagram post had caused a stir amongst the small student body, which amounted to around 30 pupils across years 7 – 11. Many of the girls were quite animated in displaying their outrage that Alice would dare to post such a '*slaggy*' picture. This was an interesting juxtaposition to the usual routine of the girls fawning over pictures of a seventeen year old Kylie Jenner wearing much less than Alice had in her Instagram post. This contradictory scene, then, seemed to be emblematic of the complicated landscape of performing the self online, in which girls and young women must negotiate global and local regulatory codes constraining femininity. One classmate had it in for Alice and felt she needed to have some sense knocked into her as a result of this post. Consequently, Alice was separated from the rest of the student body for the entirety of the day and all staff members remained on watch in case a fight broke out.

I was equal parts disturbed and intrigued. Firstly, I was interested in the way Alice agentively enacted her feminism in contrast to her passive acceptance of misogynistic retorts. What did this say about how young people were digesting the rising mainstream popularity of

feminism at this time? I was motivated to explore this further in relation to, specifically, the challenge of performing the self on the popular social media platform Instagram, where competing narratives about the *right way* to perform youthful femininities operate in tandem with the risks of social exclusion, torment, or at worst, violence if you get it *wrong*. Notedly, Instagram is a site that actively encourages users to produce streams of highly perfected depictions of their body and their life in the style of glossy magazine spreads.

In its origin, Instagram set itself apart from other social media platforms with its focus primarily on one thing, sharing photos. The news feeds of Facebook and Twitter were (and still are) clogged with news articles and status updates (Marwick, 2015). However, Instagram launched in 2010 with five simple features, photo-sharing, photo-editing, following, commenting and liking. The app was extremely popular by the end of the first week, Instagram had been downloaded 100,000 times, within three months it had reached one million users. By March 2012, the app's user base had swelled to 27 million, shortly after Facebook entrepreneur Mark Zuckerberg purchased Instagram for one billion dollars (Ibid). Facebook had (and still does have) a larger friend-oriented user base, however, digital media theorists have examined how Instagram distinguished itself by becoming synonymous with celebrity culture, aspirational living, coolness and self-branding (Marwick, 2015; Hearn, and Schoenhoff, 2015; Hund and Duffy, 2015; Duffy, 2017; Khamis, Ang and Welling, 2017). Thinking about Alice I wondered about the potential risks and rewards for socially disadvantaged girls and young women engaging in this mode of self-production.

My interest in this area is also informed by a vivid sense of power I can recall experiencing at age 14 while exercising control over my online persona through a carefully orchestrated MySpace profile. MySpace, similarly to Instagram, placed more of an emphasis on self-branding than sharing news or status updates. For instance, I would spend evenings and weekends labouring over which photo should be the focal point of my profile, what emotion from the list of options best described my mood and, of course, which song would create the appropriate tone for the page. The extent to which I felt I was failing at femininity in daily life was heightened by the dark hair that grew thick and fast on my top lip and the ADHD that coursed around my body, causing me to frequently act in *unladylike* ways. Unlike current times where feminism is extremely popular, I was firmly embedded in postfeminist

media cultures of the 00's where exerting control over your appearance signified a route to self-empowerment (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009).

For me, carefully staging performances of the self on MySpace felt like a golden opportunity to prove I could *do* femininity the *right* way. While I remained intensely focused on aspiring towards expectations of normalised femininity, I also used profile design tools on MySpace to distinguish my personality from the mainstream by voicing my taste in music, films and hobbies. In the patriarchal landscape of home, school and cultural life, it felt like a space of my own where I could control how I presented myself – digital evidence of my autonomy. However, I also carry tacit experience of how the mental and physical labour of getting femininity *right* online caused me to repetitively hover outside of my own body in everyday life, alienating myself from its materiality and eliminating my capacity to be in the moment through a self-objectifying preoccupation with capturing a digitally flattened idealised feminine self. While I experienced a level of power and pleasure through this routine behaviour, it also came with feelings of anxiety and a loss of time that otherwise could have been spent on endeavours that did not involve intensely individualised postfeminist modes of self-monitoring and surveillance.

My empathy for Alice's situation contributed to the rationale behind theatrical techniques I developed when transitioning from a Teaching Assistant to Drama Teacher at the EBD high school. I was interested in understanding how young women's experiences differed from mine due to the heightened intensity of technological saturation. I observed how new pressures were applied through a combination of the emphasis on following celebrity profiles; the homogenous effect of the polished Instagram aesthetic; and the invention of the 'Like' button. Drama classes provided a rich space to explore the landscape of Instagram. For instance, on one occasion I printed out Instagram posts from extremely popular celebrity and influencer accounts and dotted them across the floor of the classroom. I asked the girls to create embodied still images in response to these stimuli allowing them to explore the relationship between these culturally value-laden bodies and subsequent corporeal feelings and experiences held by their bodies. We also experimented with practices of embodiment to re-examine cultural values and corporeal feelings related to a variation of Instagram vernacular such as Likes, Followers, Posing, Posting, Visibility and

Comments. Improvisation techniques enabled the girls to collaboratively re-enact scenarios that had arisen as a consequence of Instagram engagement. These exercises created opportunities for embodied reflection and dialogue around issues related to the contrast between the infamous Instagram aesthetic and the student's disadvantaged social position, including corporeally held feelings of comparison, jealousy, self-loathing and judgement.

I observed that this was the only context in which girls examined social media-related issues within the formal educational environment. Instead of these issues being considered worthy of attention they were feared for their incendiary nature and ultimately deemed a burden on education. If disputes arose in connection to social media, senior management and teaching staff would often avoid labouring over these issues and instead tackle them in an individualised fashion in which each young person involved would be isolated, interviewed and then, only on some occasions, brought together to make apologies. In the drama classroom, the girls were able to collaboratively explore their experiences through sensory-driven encounters, facilitating modes of interpersonal engagement countering the normalised individuated processes of managing these issues. Consequently, I set out to conduct the research outlined in this thesis to examine the possibilities of participatory theatrical performance to provide opportunities for young women to re-examine discourses regulating what counts as successful performances of the feminine self online.

This is an interdisciplinary project that brings scholarship from theatre and performance; feminist media and cultural studies; and gender and digital media into conversation to examine the outcomes of a theatrical workshop project carried out amongst ten young women aged 17-18 from lower economic backgrounds. The research site was a Liverpool-based institution specialising in the performing arts where the participants were studying Acting.[2] Due to the coronavirus pandemic my fieldwork was brought to an abrupt halt while I was in the midst of two additional workshop projects with young women at the research site. Despite this interruption, I observed that the first project was particularly rich in providing new insights into how performance practices can support young women in

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[2] While I would have liked to carry out this research at the EBD school previously noted, sadly the school closed the year before I began conducting fieldwork.

navigating the challenges of performing the self in digital contexts. In this research, I analyse group discussion, performance exploration and one-to-one interviews to investigate the social norms undergirding the participants' negotiations of Instagram and the power of performance to re-examine and challenge these norms.

Building on insights garnered around the fraught nature of performing the self on Instagram, I discovered a heightened tendency amongst the young women at the research site to refrain from posting pictures of themselves for fear of not meeting the requirements of Instagrammability.[3] I claim that this process of weighing up the worthiness of their face, body, clothes, surroundings and social interactions to appear on Instagram can be seen as congruent with modes of self-monitoring brought into being by a popular media address described by Angela McRobbie as 'the perfect' (2020). This feminine ideal invites young women to portray,

> …a vision of life that foregrounds an array of well-groomed bodies, beautiful spaces, tasteful things and exciting identities, which indicate a sense of belonging within a comfortable family and consumer-oriented milieu. The idea of the perfect hinges on a fantasy of middle-class futurity. (2020, p. 40)

McRobbie (Ibid) illuminates the way that the continued dominance of neoliberalism, remnants of postfeminism and growth of popular feminism produce intensely individualised subject positions such as 'the perfect'. Driven by competition and an aspirational notion of 'having it all', McRobbie describes the perfect as industrious, self-governing and entrepreneurial (Ibid). To cope with this pressure to be perfect, McRobbie observes new mediated luminosities around socially accepted feminine imperfections and harmful discourses of resilience, placing an emphasis on self-sufficiency. McRobbie encapsulates this as the perfect-imperfect-resilience' (p-i-r), suggesting a specific kind of entrapment for young women. In my research, I ask how the p-i-r is reconfigured in the daily lives of young women negotiating Instagram, especially those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

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[3] The words Instagram and Instagrammable reached a cultural and discursive milestone in 2018 when they officially became verbs, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Instagrammable has been defined as 'visually appealing in a way that is suitable for being photographed for posting on the social media application Instagram' (2018). When you successfully stage or happen upon an Instagrammable moment, you are to 'Instagram' it.

My analysis, then, both extracts from and interrogates the ideas of McRobbie (2020) relating to feminine subjectivities produced by postfeminist and popular feminist media sensibilities during neoliberal times.

Specifically, I examine a specific type of dissatisfaction that emerges, which I describe as 'expressive stasis'. In elucidating the workings of expressive stasis, I take influence from Jeff Pooley's phraseology when he described a mode of participation with Facebook as 'expressive paralysis' (2010, p. 86). According to Pooley, expressive paralysis is a way of engaging with Facebook, which involves users lurking online but leaving their profile fields empty and rarely posting a status update (Ibid). Pooley's brief mention of this overlooked group invites further analysis. I suggest that paralysis is more applicable to Pooley's address of users who set up their accounts already resigned to inactivity, with no intention of ever providing updates. However, the phenomenon I address involves a group of young women who, while being gripped by bouts of stasis, continue to actively stage performances of the self in their mind's eye and everyday life. This is carried out in the hope of capturing content that shows they can perform their bodies – to use the young women's parlance – in ways that are 'beautiful and stunning' and proves that they are 'living life'. These references to digitally mediating a shimmering presence (McRobbie, 2009) and a vision of 'the good life' (Berlant, 2011) chime with the conceptualisation of 'the perfect' and its situation as an intensely individualised strand of popular feminism, equating female success with a polished and perfected Instagram profile. In this thesis, I claim that for socially disadvantaged young women, the inaccessibility of successfully performing the perfect intensifies mental thought processes of staging a future Instagrammable self. The normalisation of investing time and energy into a conceptual idea of a future self works to further individuate young women, alienating them from the materiality of their perceived imperfect bodies.

The thesis, then, presents the possibilities of using applied theatre not only to gain new insights around young women's negotiations of performing youthful Instagrammable femininities, but to determine the power of performance to re-awaken perceptions of corporeal knowledge, countering mediated discourses of individualisation and technological modes of alienation. Thus, in this research, I am influenced by a body of literature outlining the body as both a receptacle and producer of knowledge (Taylor, 2020; Schneider, 2011). I

examine the capacity of embodied performance practices to allow participants to 're-world' their experiences of Instagram in ways that allow them to 're-meet' (Howe, 2019) one's own cultural and embodied knowledge. Building on this, I observe how participatory performance allows participants to re-meet one another, intervening with discourses of resilient individuality that undergird young women's experiences of negotiating Instagram.

In what follows, I further explicate the context of this research locating the critical concept of postfeminism as integral to understanding current permutations of popular feminism, such as 'the perfect-imperfect-resilience' (McRobbie, 2020). I then set out my approach to different conceptions of performing the self in daily life and digital contexts, illuminating an intensification of bodily alienation as a consequence of conceptual staging methods. With this, I underline the traditions of applied theatre scholarship and practice that place an emphasis on providing opportunities for everyday people to explore cultural and embodied knowledge, re-uniting their thinking minds with their practicing bodies to transfer knowledge between bodies. Methodologically, I identify the adoption of a mode of analysis described as a polyphonic conversation (Mackey, 2016) in order to attend to the multifaceted and interdisciplinary nature of this research. In doing so, I hope to emphasise the originality on this research: drawing on the fields of feminist media and cultural studies and gender and digital culture, to examine the discursive and material knowledge that emerges in an applied theatre context privileging embodiment. Finally, this chapter is concluded with my chapter summaries which provide an outline for the examination in this thesis.

Context of Research: Postfeminism, Popular Feminism and 'the Perfect'

In this section, I set out the cultural context of this thesis, focusing on, specifically, the importance of understanding the critical concept of postfeminism in order to comprehend current permutations of popular feminism (Rottenberg, Gill and Banet-Weiser, 2020), such as 'the perfect' (McRobbie, 2020). This thesis is centrally concerned with 'the perfect' (McRobbie, 2020) as a mediated discourse that constructs spectacular forms of Western feminine subjectivities, specifically in relation to young women's stage management of the digital mediation of their bodies and lifestyles. Considering its omnipresence on Instagram, I

examine how this unattainable ideal of contemporary femininity impacts upon working class young women's interpretation and enactment of youthful femininities online. Important to this thesis is the ways in which the perfect is bolstered by popular feminist ideology, while re-packaging and reasserting the relentless individualism of the postfeminist ethos (McRobbie, 2020). The central strand of 'the perfect' I engage with is the aspirational popular feminist vision of the beautified and glamorously adorned subject who lives an exciting and stylish life, which, as Gill argues, calls forth the postfeminist entanglement of notions of empowerment and choice that enrol women in ever more intense regimes of self-monitoring and self-perfecting (2020). This research re-examines 'the perfect' in a digital context in order to understand how a popular feminist sense of individualism intensifies postfeminist processes of scrutiny, constraining young women's capacity to stage and perform the self to be shared on Instagram.

The explosion of popularity around mediated feminist discourse in recent years has initiated a number of debates questioning the continued relevance of the term postfeminism. In surveying this scene, Gill, Sarh Banet-Weiser and Catherine Rottenberg (2020) maintain the cruciality of postfeminism, not just as a term to understand the past but for understanding current times. While postfeminism has been defined in multiple ways, feminist media and cultural scholars understand it as a media sensibility, depicting a highly neoliberal version of femininity in which some principles of liberal feminism are taken into account while actively disavowing a continuation of feminist politics (McRobbie, 2009; Gill, 2007). The marked transformation from the repudiation of feminism to passionate exclamations and celebrations of feminism underscores the importance of distinguishing between postfeminism from that of popular feminism in consideration of the impact of mediated discourses on constructions of contemporary femininity.

There is a burgeoning field of scholarship concerned with the evolution of popular feminist media cultures. Such articulations have documented understandings of violently contradictory media narratives aimed at women. For instance, major advertisement campaigns and social media hashtag activism cajole young women to shake off their insecurities to live an empowered and successful life (Banet-Weiser, 2018: Gill, 2016), while simultaneously they are bombarded with visuals of celebrities and influencers who,

following on from a postfeminist ethos, depict a highly de-politicised notion of 'the spectacularly feminine' (McRobbie, 2009, p. 60), that equates female success with self-mastering displays of 'the perfect' body and life on Instagram (McRobbie, 2015). As McRobbie (2020) states, young women must contend with living in an intensely neoliberal popular feminist context, with heightened expectations of their capacity to work tirelessly toward a fantasy of 'the perfect', while accepting their imperfections and nursing an understanding that it is their responsibility to build resilience against oppressive forces working against them. In this thesis, I reconfigure the conceptualisation the perfect-imperfect-resilience (McRobbie, 2020) to underline how strands of popular feminism play out in lives working class young women negotiating Instagram. In this distinct moment of feminist popularity, where even agendas that explicitly label themselves as feminist coincide with discourses of neoliberalism, I also draw on postfeminism as an extremely useful, though partial, framework to understand young women's approach to digitally mediated performances of the self.

Staging and Performing the Self Online

The terms staging and performing the self are used in this thesis, given the intensification of self-performance in the age of social media. Consequently, I draw on scholarship situating performance as a central feature of the presentation of self, including examinations of everyday life (Goffman, 1959), femininity and class (Skeggs, 1997) and specifically, how performances of the self are staged in the context of Instagram (Abidin, 2016; Duffy and Hund, 2019). For these scholars, the body is interpreted as a discursive construction scripted by social, cultural and political forces, with its value read by its capacity to enact convincing performances. As Goffman writes, 'We are all just actors trying to control and manage our public image, we act based on how others might see us' (1959, p. 22). For Goffman, any space with two or more people has a performative element (Ibid). The analogy of the contrasting frontstage and backstage is posed to demonstrate how the frontstage cajoles performances to be enacted in relation to larger social, cultural and historical structures, whereas the backstage allows singular performers to step out of character (Ibid, pp. 106-140).

Goffman accounts for a degree of spontaneity in everyday face-to-face interactions. In contrast, digitally mediated performances of the self enable and promote carefully staged depictions, eliminating unrehearsed gestures common in everyday sociality (Pooley, 2010). The strategies and investments through which digital presentations of the self are perfected are therefore, rich sites for examination. Indeed, digital and gender media scholars have examined how the social media attention economy compels users to engage in time consuming processes of 'visibility labour' so as to self-brand and accrue status (Abidin, 2016). More recently, a backlash against posting #blessed lifestyles congruent with what McRobbie describes as 'the perfect' (2020) has been examined as producing equally laborious subjectivities. This has been made evident by Hund and Duffy (2019), who account for the phenomenon of middle class professional content creators preoccupied by a new 'visibility mandate' involving them inserting snapshots of blemishes and messy hair amongst otherwise perfect streams of beautiful bodies and stylish settings to toe the line between appearing both aspirational and authentic. Yet, for socially disadvantaged young women, classed structures provide less scope to toggle between perfection and imperfection. Due to class based shaming, for instance, prescribing to a youthful version of the perfect might seem a safer option, however the notion of carefully staging Instagrammability produces subjectivities that cannot be readily enacted no matter how much physical labour they invest in. Despite this, the participants in this study remained active in their pursuit of Instagrammability. As such, I focus on staging and performing the self in digital contexts as a gendered and classed form of mental labour, in which time and effort is put in to thought processes in the hope of depicting a future perfect self.

I draw on scholarship from Skeggs (2004; 2009) to frame these processes of staging and performing the self as an endeavour to be recognised as of value through specific relations to youthful Instagrammable femininities. For instance, in my analysis, I found that subjects refer to a likeness or discordancy to an imagined ideal in order to measure a posts capacity to accrue symbolic value. When a post is deemed as having little symbolic value the subject is gripped by expressive stasis and returns to a metaphoric rehearsal room in the mind's eye to begin the process again. Therefore, my thesis specifically addresses the ways in which alienating processes of disembodiment are intensified in digital contexts. Consequently, I examine the possibilities of using applied theatre to 're-world' young women's experiences

of Instagram in ways attend to mediated discourses regulating how the body signifies. Going beyond this, I examine the possibilities of participatory performance to invite participants to interact in corporeally present ways providing opportunities to disconnect from harmful processes of individualisation and alienation.

Applied Theatre Practice with Young Women

Since it emerged as a key scholarly and practical field in the 1990s, applied theatre has demonstrated the power of participatory performance to give a voice to everyday people that often go unheard. My research primarily draws on scholarship from a particular time period (between 2001 and 2014) in which there was a burgeoning interest in the potential of participatory performance to restore voice amongst girls and young women (Gallagher, 2001; Hatton, 2003, 2012, 2013; Howard, 2004; Ramsey, 2014). This research illuminated the emancipatory quality of facilitating embodied and unscripted performance practices amongst female students in educational environments, against the backdrop of a fundamentally patriarchal curriculum. It explored the potentials of applying theatre in educational settings to allow girls and young women to create meaning through theatre and performance rooted in their experiences.

I have identified a shift where the scholars noted above went on to focus more broadly on youth theatre in education[4]. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis, I am interested in this shift towards analysing youth theatre in mixed gender classrooms and the rise of popular feminism, and as Sarah Banet-Weiser notes, it's 'insistence on a universal definition of "equality" between men and women as its key definition' (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 13). In more recent work, Christine Hatton has shifted from facilitating girl-centred drama (Hatton, 2003, 2012, 2013) to thinking about how this work can inform using drama for gender equality, through a process that allows mixed gender participants to problematise prejudices about gender (Hatton, 2020). I agree with Hatton that drama holds potential for participants in co-educational environments to work together to critique and scrutinise

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[4] While there was a shift towards studying youth theatre more broadly there were some exceptions to this. For instance, more recently Gallagher has published work on race, gender, girlhood and pedagogies of applied theatre (Gallagher, 2017; Gallagher and Rodricks, 2017a).

gendered dynamics and social injustices. However, I feel strongly that girls and young women still deserve to have spaces to safely explore the specificities of their experiences, particularly in times of popular feminism where universal equal rights have been used to denounce specificity and typically signify the experiences of white, middle class, cis-gendered and heterosexual identity. Despite this noted shift, there is applied theatre scholarship that remains concerned with the nuances of girls and young women's experiences. For instance, recently Elsa Szatek has examined girl-centered applied theatre contexts and the structural and situational qualities of vulnerability in relation to class, ethnicity, place, sexuality and gender (Szatek, 2022). Building on this, Szatek has worked with post-humanist thinker Karin Gunnarsson to theorise the power of theatrical playfulness to enable girls to play critically with the violent aspects of body hair removal (Szatek and Gunnarsson, 2023). I aim to contribute to this body of literature with my research focusing on the potentials of applied theatre to intervene with exclusionary gendered and classed perceptions of performing the perfect on Instagram. In my research, however, I have primarily drawn upon earlier applied theatre research carried out with girls and young women as these case studies directly informed both the design of the workshops and my approach to theoretical analysis.

While I do not place an emphasis on the broader field of youth theatre scholarship, it is worth noting here that recently there has been a surge of research published concerning applied theatre and the future possibilities that applied theatre might offer young people experiencing additional challenges to social, cultural and artistic participation (Gallagher and Rodricks, 2017b; Choi, 2018; Busby, 2021). This work has contributed to longstanding applied theatre debates about the binaries of effect/affect. These debates are rooted in questioning how applied theatre practitioners and scholars measure impact. Many scholars have cautioned against celebrating the instrumental effects of practice (Balfour, 2009; Thompson, 2009; Snyder-Young, 2013; Gallagher, 2014; Adebayo, 2015). Selina Busby embraces the integrity and scrutiny that these debates bring to applied theatre work, underlining the challenge of using qualitative methods to produce hard evidence of improvement (2021, p. 6). Despite this, Busby believes that applied theatre can be an avenue for hope and change; encapsulating this she describes her approach to practice and research as a 'pedagogy of utopia' (Ibid). Here, utopia is employed not to simply signify the

hope of a better life but rather to underline the potential of applied theatre to enable participants to become re-sensitised to their circumstances, in ways that develops a desire to change or disrupt these circumstances (Ibid). This chimes with a central component of Augusto Boal's work: the idea that we can bring an alternative, or even a utopian future into being by practicing it in the fictional world through performance (Boal, 2008). In this research, I offer a theorisation of my adaptions Boalian techniques, making the argument that applied theatre offers a valuable platform that might be thought of as an interim step – that is not practicing a utopian future – but is instead providing space for young women to re-embody their experiences and sit with them a little longer. In doing so, this scholarship aims to bridge the gap between applied theatre and feminist media and cultural studies scholarship providing an analysis of the role participatory performance might play in feminist politics. In intensely neoliberal times of gendered individualisation, I argue that there is an inherent hopefulness foregrounding a theatre where young women can use performance to collaborate, connect, commiserate, share experiences and understand difference.

A central component of applied theatre is its capacity to provide participants with opportunities to address specific issues, allowing for the production of new knowledge and new modes of connection and intervention (Shaughnessy, 2012; Nicholson, 2005; Busby, 2021). Applied theatre practice involves inviting participants to interact in corporeally present ways, providing opportunities to encounter the knowledge that others' bodies bear and bring one's own corporeal knowledge into these interactions. Indeed, a primary undertaking carried out by applied theatre practitioners when working with a new group involves facilitating exercises allowing participants to reunite their thinking minds with their material bodies (Rowe, 2023). The larger field of avant-garde theatre and performance practices have conducted wide ranging investigations into specific practices that seek to heighten experiential encounters of corporeal perception and knowledge production. In this thesis, I extend qualities of feminist Performance Art to Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) in order examine the power of embodied performance practice to get participants out of their heads in order to be reacquainted with their practicing bodies. Both practices explore and reflect critically on how the relationships to our bodies has been constructed. Embodied performance practices are situated within this research as a key

method to explore how bodies are conditioned to act in accordance with sets of governmental rules, knowledges and social norms. Additionally, I observe the possibilities of these practices to allow participants to produce new embodied knowledges challenging these systems of regulation.

My research methodology is grounded in observation and critical reflection to underline the contribution of feminist applied theatre work to the fields of feminist media and cultural studies and gender and digital media. Drawing on Sally Mackey's (2016) conceptualisation, I use the metaphor of 'polyphonic conversations' to account for mobile analytical dialogue conducted between these fields in this research. In doing so, I aim to underline the power of applied theatrical interventions to intervene with technological processes of alienation and mediatised narratives of individualisation.

Chapter summaries

In this thesis's first and second chapters, I engage with the theories and practices that contribute to the theorisation of using applied theatre to examine young women and Instagram. In Chapter One, I draw on feminist cultural and media studies scholarship to trace the way contemporary popular media have addressed young women. This lays the foundation for my analysis, which reconfigures how media discourses of 'the perfect-imperfect-resilience' (McRobbie, 2020) play out in the lives of young women negotiating Instagram; producing a specific form of gendered and classed self-government and surveillance. I then highlight digital media and gender scholarship as underlining the intensity of thought, consideration and planning that goes into staging and performing the self online. I illuminate key resonances between these fields that I will draw on to analyse how thoughtfully staging digital performances of the perfect self works to isolate young women and alienate them from the materiality of their bodies. In response to this scene, in Chapter Two, I elucidate the power of applied theatre to not only attune participants to forces of social construction but to sensitise them to a corporeally held perception of these power relations. In this chapter, theoretical approaches and practical interventions are examined as offering key tools to bring feminist media and cultural studies; gender and digital culture into conversation with applied theatre scholarship. In particular, I draw on

key theorisations and practical interventions across the practices of Theatre of the Oppressed, Performance Art and Drama in Education to further demonstrate aspects of embodiment that might disrupt the more isolating conditions of staging well-thought-out performances of the self online.

In Chapter Three, I outline the methodological framing of this research. This chapter locates the broader landscape of the research by providing a detailed account of the research site and the participants; my approach to conducting the workshop project and methods of analysis; as well as a discussion of issues of positionality, ethics and power. I elucidate how the applied theatre context fostered 'polyphonic conversations' (Mackey, 2016) between myself and the participants, allowing for moments of sharing in the production of knowledge. Finally, I discuss how this idea of polyphony also informs my methods of conducting an interdisciplinary analysis, as it allows for conversations between the discursive and the affective, theory and practice, action and reflection. Chapter Four focuses on the young women's assertions during group discussions to provide a detailed account of their experiences of engaging with Instagram. I elucidate how the p-i-r must be reconfigured to attend to their participation with feminine cultures of Instagrammability. In doing so, I identify the raced, classed and gendered dimensions of expressive stasis. Through employing a polyphonic conversation as an analytical framework, I draw from a wide range of interdisciplinary scholarship to examine the prevalence of staging and performance in the accounts voiced by the young women, despite their online inactivity. However, I am particularly attentive to how these theatrical processes are disembodied, flattened and de-dramatised through a deeply thoughtful state that works to alienate the young woman from the materiality of her body.

In Chapter Five, I provide an account of the insurgent possibilities of applied theatre to allow participants to 're-world' Instagram. This theatrical mode of exploration disturbs the notion of Instagram as a resolutely surface phenomenon, allowing participants to re-encounter the world made by Instagram somewhere between the conceptual and the sensory. Specifically, I examine the outcomes of three performance exercises allowing participants to use embodiment to unsettle regulatory forces, such as the perfect/imperfect and rub up against the contours of expressive stasis, in ways that allow them to re-examine its terms. Building

on the examination carried out in Chapter Five, in Chapter Six of this thesis, I focus on the possibilities of this process of re-worlding to allow participants to re-meet each other, enabling modes of interpersonal engagement countering gendered languages of individualistic resilience. In particular, I examine the place of applied theatre as providing a space for young women to go beyond messages of resilience and repair, enabling them to recognise embodied and collaborative knowledge production as a way to disrupt individualised understandings of negotiating their mediated social worlds. In particular, I observe how new knowledges of relationality emerge through the analysis of two performance exercises and post-project one-on-one interviews. In the concluding chapter, I provide an overview of the key findings outlined in this thesis in relation to the broader political climate. I reflect upon the necessity of extra-curricular arts initiatives centring issues dominant in young people's lives and the worrying conditions that surround the possibility of facilitating such projects.

Chapter One:

Femininity, Media and Digital Cultures of Performing the Self

Young women no longer simply negotiate the meaning of mediated femininities but have a stake in staging and producing their own media on platforms such as Instagram. Notoriously, the Instagram aesthetic invites users to curate highly perfected portrayals of spectacularly groomed bodies and sparkling lifestyles. Despite the recent popularity of strands of feminism across mainstream media, the notion of Instagrammability continues to restabilise violent postfeminist regimes of self-monitoring and self-improvement. Theorising contemporary media discourses, feminist media and cultural studies scholarship attends to how the labour undergirding successful displays of 'the perfect' life draws on a feminist voice to reframe this self-work in the context of empowerment, choice and control (McRobbie, 2020). My research examines what is unearthed when applied theatre workshops are used to 're-world' the experiences of working class young women attempting to stage performances of the perfect. As such, the interdisciplinary nature of this study necessitates a comparatively extensive discussion of its theoretical underpinnings in order to effectively bring the fields of feminist cultural and media studies; gender and digital media; and applied theatre into conversation.

In this chapter, then, I discuss the significance of understanding postfeminist media discourses of self-surveillance when examining young women's negotiation of digital cultures of performing the self. Additionally, I draw on scholarship concerned with the complicated scene of popular feminism, where one strand declares performing the perfect as an act of empowerment and another rails against it, offering coping methods and ways to embrace feminine imperfections. I draw attention to work underlining how a popular embrace of feminist concerns has introduced into the fold, overlapping media languages of the 'perfect-imperfect-resilience' (McRobbie, 2020). I emphasise the value of this scholarship for understanding the contemporary individualising address to young women, marking tight boundaries around socially valued femininities (Ibid). Drawing on digital media and gender scholarship, I claim that a new 'visibility mandate' requiring middle class professional content creators to confidently appear both aspirational and authentic (Duffy

and Hund, 2019) is highly compatible with the overlapping popular feminist languages of the perfect-imperfect-resilience. This suggests a specific kind of entrapment for onlooking everyday young women negotiating digital cultures of performing the self. It is in this juncture that I situate my own reconfiguration of how this entrapment plays out in the lives of working class young women, through the examination of applied theatre interventions.

Postfeminist Luminosities: Key Sites of Surveillance

Early theorisations of postfeminism addressed the way that popular media appeared to be supportive of women's liberation by taking second wave feminist gains into account while rejecting a continuation of feminism under the guise that women were already free and in control of their lives (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009). Following two scholars that have been pivotal in tracing the shifts of femininity and feminism in the lives of girls and young women, this research is aligned with Angela McRobbie (2009) and Rosalind Gill's (2007) conceptualisation of postfeminism as a media sensibility that is deeply connected to the rise of neoliberalism.[5] As such, McRobbie's (2009) postfeminist 'luminosities' provide a key framework for comprehending how particular sites of surveillance came to mark out socially accepted realms of femininity, where young women might put thought, energy and time into proving their individual capacity to thrive.

Re-thinking Gilles Deleuze's concept of luminosities in the context of postfeminist subjects, McRobbie poses:

> The power they seem to be collectively in possession of, is 'created by the light itself'. These luminosities are suggestive of post-feminist equality while also defining and circumscribing the conditions of such a status. They are clouds of light which give young women a shimmering presence, and in so doing they also mark out the terrain of the consummately and reassuringly feminine. (2009, p. 60)

Three overlapping spaces of luminosity identified by McRobbie are of significant value for my research: the fashion-beauty complex; the space of sexuality; and the space of education

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[5] I understand neoliberalism as a form of governmental logic, becoming pervasive as a consequence of the Thatcher government, favouring free-market capitalism and the privatisation of state assets (Foucault, 2008; Brown, 2015). This ideology implicates bodies and communities, who are encouraged to treat the self as an entrepreneurial project, utilising practices of self-monitoring in order to succeed (McRobbie, 2009; Gill, 2007).

and employment. These luminous spaces have been recognised in the media as producing a highly individualised address constructing a postfeminist subjectivity foregrounded on notions of choice and capacity, while situating these sites of femininity as manageable problems that must be rigorously evaluated, implemented and performed (McRobbie, 2009). Many scholars have underlined the significance of these luminosities for understanding the relations between culturally valued femininities and gendered self-production in Western Media (Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008; Banet-Weiser, 2012; Winch, 2013; Dobson, 2016).

Firstly, McRobbie critiques the fashion-beauty complex for the ways in which it urges all women to become 'harsh judges of themselves' and, consequently, engage in laborious regimes of self-monitoring (2009, p. 59). Notably, there is a long tradition of women adjured to attain beauty and select pleasing fashion *choices*. In her analysis of *Jackie* magazine in the late 1970s, McRobbie found that girls were constrained from wearing too much makeup and avoid making fashion statements that would make them stand out from the crowd in order to ensure success in romance (1991). Gill observes a heightened intensity in which the postfeminist address leaves no area safe from evaluation and development: 'each part of the body must be suitably toned, conditioned, waxed, moisturized, scented and attired' (2008, p. 42). Women carry out these extensive grooming rituals for *themselves*, as control over appearance is rebranded as an empowered portrayal of 'spectacularly feminine' (McRobbie, 2009, p. 60) subjectivity. Writing from a Western context, McRobbie (Ibid) and Gill (2007) critique the privileging of white, middle class, and reassuringly beautiful femininity across a range of popular media. Consequently, the postfeminist luminosity around fashion-beauty becomes a central method to measure one's ability to successfully achieve feminine subjectivity, alienating those girls and women who are unable to comply on the basis of their class and/or race.

The second luminosity of significance is the space of sexuality. A cloud of light is observed as emerging around heterosexuality during the postfeminist era, as a precautionary measure, given that women are less dependent on men and expected to challenge male dominance due to their newfound economic capacity (McRobbie, 2009). This almost ubiquitous portrayal of heterosexual imagery in television, film, magazines and advertisements

constrains sexuality within a grid of heterosexual normativity (Ibid). Additionally, empowerment rhetoric such as choice and freedom work to incorporate neoliberal values of sexual agency to mask the internalisation of the male gaze on a dangerously imperceptible level (Gill, 2008). Where once advertisements routinely sexualised representations of women, for instance, submissively draped over a car, there was a postfeminist shift from objectification to self-subjectification (Ibid). Gill observes that young women came to be portrayed as 'active, desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their (implicitly 'liberated') interests to do so' (Ibid, p. 42).

Thirdly, there is the space of education and employment in which McRobbie poses that, 'work and wage earning capacity come to dominate rather than be subordinate to women's self-identity' (2009, p. 61). The election of the New Labour government in the UK in 1997 and their discursive framing of young women as 'subjects of potential' sought to promulgate the belief that if young women work hard enough, they can be successful in their studies and the employment market (Ibid). This notion of 'meritocratic reward' chimed with other neoliberal economies failing to acknowledge the disadvantages encountered by marginalised women systemically governed by classed and racist social structures (Ibid). In a more recent analysis, Akane Kanai asserts the continued relevance of postfeminism, despite the growing popularity of feminism at the time of writing. Specifically, Kanai extends McRobbie's emphasis on work and wages to a broader space of ambition and productivity to address digital cultures of feminine self-production in which young women are expected to work hard and thrive in all spheres, portraying curated presentations of fashion and beauty, sexual-attractiveness, romance, social life, and career progression (Kanai, 2016). This argument is particularly relevant for my thesis as I examine, specifically, the implications for working class young women when, as Kanai puts it, 'femininity and its performance become forms of necessary work' (Ibid, p. 19).

Despite postfeminism's association with a particular period in time when feminist politics were actively denounced, feminist media and cultural theorists have asserted the continued relevance of these defining characteristics of postfeminist identity, specifically in regard to tracing the continuities and shifts between contemporary mediated feminisms and cultures

of feminine self-production (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Kanai, 2018; Banet-Weiser, Gill and Rottenberg, 2020; McRobbie, 2020). As such, in this thesis, I locate the defining characteristics of postfeminist identity discussed here as foundational to understanding the architecture of a gendered individualism that remains central to staging well-thought out performances of the feminine self on social media.

Shifting Media Landscapes: From Postfeminism to Popular Feminism

In this section, I provide a further fleshing out of the contemporary significance of postfeminist luminosities by mapping historical shifts in media narratives addressing young women, ranging from a passive mass audience to a knowing individualised postfeminist subject to a recent popular feminist repacking of the individualising address, constructing a resilient subject. I focus on these shifts in order to situate my own reconfiguration of how young women negotiate their mediated social worlds in relational to a particular historical and technological context.

Historically, women were once understood to be addressed by the media as part of a feminine mass audience as a consequence of the mid-20th century dominance of broadcast media. In a determinist view, Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) influentially understood young women as duped by popular mass culture, passively absorbing ideas pertaining to femininity. Subsequently, feminist media scholars fought for diversification of the extremely narrow and sexist representation of unassertive and subordinate female roles across television[6] (Downing, 1974; Lopate, 1976). In Britain in the late 1970s, however, a small number of feminist scholars based at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham initiated a shift in feminist analysis.[7] With an emphasis on media experienced primarily by women and girls, they examined active negotiation of meaning. Prior to this, the CCCS was known for its radical Marxist work with an emphasis on masculinity and class, primarily investigating popular culture as a site for resistance, negotiated by the disempowered and marginalised. Refuting the trivialising of women's genres, feminists at

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[6] Feminist scholarship focused on television audiences as ownership of televisions became widespread in the 1970s.
[7] To explore Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies further see Gelder (2005).

Birmingham argued for a renewed consideration of feminised mass media, situating magazines and soap operas as powerful conveyors of ideologies of femininity.

While young women continued to be addressed as a mass audience, this research elucidated how women were using media to intervene in and manage their daily lives. As previously noted, McRobbie, one of the CCCS's most prominent feminist cultural theorists, examined *Jackie* magazine, which reached almost every girl in the UK during the 1970s (McRobbie, 1991). McRobbie was inspired to investigate the source of its popularity and how normative femininity was being constructed on a weekly basis. In her ethnographic research, carried out with a small group of working class girls living in the same estate in Birmingham, McRobbie found that the girls used magazines, fashion and makeup as forms of resistance against school protocol (Ibid, p. 58). However, in the absence of academic, career and economic support received by middle class girls, it was evident that working class girls were prone to envisage a future that reflected the prescribed traditions portrayed in *Jackie*, of securing a husband and becoming a wife and mother (Ibid).

In the 1970s-80s, Second Wave feminist activism led to new forms of domestic, reproductive, academic and work related liberation that sought to change the predictable path for women marked out in *Jackie* magazine. In turn, these Second Wave feminist gains can be seen as having a significant effect on mediated assumptions around women's autonomy. Despite varying levels of access to these newfound rights – primarily limited to white, middle class and able-bodied women – the postfeminist address initiated a disavowal of a continuation of feminist politics while appearing supportive of female liberalisation (McRobbie, 2009). As such, the wide dissemination of the postfeminist luminosities discussed above disrupted the traditional mass experience of encountering feminine ideals of beauty, fashion, work and domesticity, recasting these sites in the context of individual capacity and potential. The presence of this gendered form of neoliberalism has been examined across a range of mediums including film, television, make-over reality television (RTV), advertising and fashion photography.

The genre of 'make-over' RTV programmes such as *What Not to Wear* (2001), for instance, encouraged women spectators to scrutinise female participants in terms of measuring their

success in portraying the distinct luminosities characterising postfeminist identity (McRobbie, 2009, p. 124). The relationality of the spectator to other women, then, is reconfigured through the acquisition of a subject position that promotes intensive self-monitoring practices (Skeggs and Wood, 2013). In this sense, the young woman's life becomes a project to be managed. Further to this, Gill recognises that this ongoing and constant monitoring is cast through a lens of '"fun" or "pampering" [...] Magazines offer tips to girls and young women to enable them to continue the work of femininity but still appear as entirely confident, carefree and unconcerned about their self-presentation' (2007, p. 262). Consequently, improving the appearance of the self is situated as an individual challenge, in which the subject must negotiate the contradictions of carrying out gruelling identity work while appearing carefree.

In the changing landscape of the relations between spectatorship, representation and production, feminist media scholars have considered the tension between the individualising postfeminist address and new media configurations. For instance, the stake reality TV participants have in managing their mediation is intensified in the omnipresent landscape of everyday social media participation. Banet-Weiser (2012) accounts for the ways that social media presents new possibilities in surveillance, heightening critical approaches to self-production as the online participant is prompted to measure her cultural intelligibility against existing gendered economies of sexually attractive femininity. Further, in analysis of digital audiences, Winch (2013) demonstrates how these platforms work to normalise and legitimate an intensification of the postfeminist address in which the subject is actively seeking evaluation from other users. The surveillance-heavy, commoditised framework of social media reinforces what Hearn (2008) describes as the 'branded self' coinciding with the uptake of the neoliberal ethos and celebrity practices, in which the everyday user views oneself as a consumer product, investing in labour and postfeminist techniques of control and curation (Marshall, 2010; Banet-Weiser, 2012; Dobson, 2016; Kanai, 2018).

Writing in this context, Dobson (2016) locates MySpace as a site where adolescent girls negotiate postfeminist conceptions of control and empowerment, positioning themselves through a lens of hyper sexualisation as both active subject and object in alignment with the

postfeminist characterisation of sexuality. Problematising moral panic discourses around issues of girls' hyper-sexualisation, Dobson (2016) implores an empathetic understanding attentive to the wider social context, arguing that these digital platforms represent one of the only sites where girls can express autonomous desire in ways that revoke traditional feminine codes of purity, passivity and silence. Understanding girls' empowerment through their compliance with ideals of sexual attractiveness is complicated. For instance, Dobson also illuminates the limits of postfeminist notions of girls' autonomy as consequence of the anxiety-making impossibility of knowing one is 'doing it right' and the social stigma of one's failure (Ibid). Such a landscape produces specific limitations and risks for participants in judging the right way to put oneself out there. Through a further complexification of the constitutive limits of postfeminist identity, Dobson considers less successful visible displays, suggesting that instead of viewing YouTube videos such as one entitled 'Am I pretty or ugly?, as a 'lack of self esteem or an excess of self focus' (2016, p. 133), we can acknowledge this response as underlining our investment in the 'can do' individualising postfeminist narrative. This scholarship provides insights for navigating the complex landscape of young women negotiating the demands of individualising discourses through social media. In particular, it implores feminist analysis that is both empathetic and critical, considering new digital cultures of feminine self-production as explicitly linked to the wider scopic economy. Yet, in order to comprehend the contemporary scopic economy of performing the self, I must turn to literature tracing the explosion of popular feminism in mainstream media.

Feminist cultural and media studies theorists have mapped a new luminosity around feminism in popular culture (McRobbie, 2015, 2020; Gill, 2016; Banet-Weiser, 2012, 2018; Kanai, 2016, 2018). This has involved evaluating the utility of the concept of postfeminism for a recent moment marked by a generational resurgence of interest in mediated feminism among young women. Situated by Gill as 'the cool-ing of feminism' (2016, p. 618), she addresses a post-postfeminism moment, recognising a shift from feminism as a repudiated political and cultural facet of identity to a celebrated and stylish one. This is supported by cultural happenings such as *Elle* magazine now annually publishing a feminist issue and celebrities such as Emma Watson, Beyonce and Jennifer Lawrence proudly identifying as feminists. Due to a rise in feminism's heightened visibility in the public sphere through social media-based feminist activism, several scholars have questioned the value of postfeminism

as a critical term during this moment (Lumby, 2011; Whelehan and Gwynne, 2014; Retallack, Ringrose and Lawrence, 2016). However, in 2016 Gill observed that the feminist politics being celebrated and gaining the most visibility via popular media outlets were 'oddly contentless' (Gill, 2016, p. 622).

Furthermore, Gill argues,

> If the first way of signifying feminism can be termed in shorthand "you go girls!," this second is the repeated celebrity claim "I am not afraid to call myself a feminist"—a claim that turns attention away from what being a feminist is or might be, instead refocusing it on the courage and defiance of the models, actresses, or other celebrities who would dare to own this identity'. (Ibid, p. 623)

Gill provokes a consideration of the distinction between different kinds of feminism, arguing that contentless neoliberal espousals of feminism have little in common with the activist feminism of those dismantling the current gender regime, fighting for the rights of deported migrants, protesting cuts to women's services, anti-austerity activism, sex worker activism, queer and trans engagements and many more (Ibid, p. 616). Despite the re-instated nature of feminism in popular culture, I am in agreement with these scholars when they assert postfeminism remains a critical term when grappling with the complexities of contemporary cultural media and power relations dictating which types of feminism gain the most visibility.

Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) has contextualised how 'the cool-ing of feminism' (Gill, 2016) evolved to a moment where feminism is incredibly popular, positing:

> It feels as if everywhere you turn, there is an expression of feminism – on a T-shirt, in a movie, in the lyrics of a pop song, in an inspirational Instagram post, in an awards ceremony speech. (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 1)

In addition to less weighted acts such as wearing a feminist slogan T-Shirt, Banet-Weiser identifies a significant shift in the two-year gap between Gill's article discussed above and the publication of *Empowered* (2018), in which more concrete forms of popular feminist action have emerged. For Banet-Weiser, it is media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter,

and Instagram that have enabled the visibility of feminisms that have long struggled to be recognised in culture (Ibid). Writing from a post #MeToo standpoint, Banet-Weiser acknowledges the hashtag that mobilised the explosive movement influencing hundreds of women to share stories regarding sexual harassment (Ibid, p 8). It is noted that while there was heightened coverage around the #MeToo movement, the dissemination of stories was largely centred around the powerful men accused and often, the white female celebrities accusing them, thus the visibility in mainstream media of women of colour and working-class women and their stories of abuse were virtually non-existent (Ibid). Building on Gill's analysis, Banet-Weiser recognises an increase of substance in the popularisation of feminism in the current digital landscape, however, she argues that 'in a capitalist, corporate economy of visibility, those feminisms that are most easily commodified and branded are those that become the most visible' (Ibid, p. 13).

One extremely popular strand of feminism – overtly drawing from postfeminist logic – is the marketisation of 'having it all', bringing to mind slogan t-shirts with the quote 'Empowered Women, empower women'. Contributing to this scene is the self-help books and online communities marketised by Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook's then Chief Operating Officer, who utilises these platforms to promulgate middle class aspirations of marriage and work, encouraging women to perfect the work/home balance. McRobbie crystalises this strand of popular feminism as 'the perfect' (2015), a concept that I claim can be extended to Kanai's (2016) discussion of how thriving in all feminine spheres becomes necessary in postfeminist digital cultures of self-production. Now fortified by a feminist underpinning, 'the perfect' encourages women to utilise social media to prove the meritocratic attainment of feminised landmarks. Congruent with Berlant's (2011) idea of the 'good life', publicly documenting the fruits of one's monitoring and discipline with regard to the body, relationships, domesticity, mothering, work and leisure becomes equated with one's capacity to overcome gendered adversity. This defines the modes of digital self-production compatible with Catherine Rottenberg's (2018) theorisation of neoliberal feminism: an individualistic, self-empowered feminism deeming women responsible for their disadvantages and encouraging them to 'lean in' to heightened competitiveness in all areas of life.

At the same time, however, mounting feminist concerns around the pressure to successfully acquire the perfect life and the perfect body inspired the #bodypositivity movement. This popular feminist social media campaign involves participants sharing images of themselves defying feminine ideals of clear skin and taut stomachs to send the message that women and girls are beautiful, *flaws and all* (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 48). Banet-Weiser also examines the absorption of this message by widely viewed brand campaigns (*Dove, Nike, Always*) that came to disseminate a body positivity message centred around neoliberal values of empowering the individual female subject to shake off her low-esteem to fulfil her capacity in the luminous space of ambition and productivity (Ibid). Such a message is recuperative, meaning a resilient spectator is addressed, one that recognises the sexism at play but understands that if they *believe* they are beautiful, their confidence issues will be resolved, further reinforcing the importance of appearance in defining who you are and whom you can become. Moreover, the popular feminist address here echoes a postfeminist disregard for raced and classed structures that unevenly implicate women.

This scholarship is important for laying out the socio-political landscape of my research. Despite the re-emergence of feminism in the popular sphere, women's bodies are routinely ridiculed via the comment section of widely viewed platforms such as the *Daily Mail* online and on social media. This reminds young women that whether they painstakingly follow the rules and regulations of normative femininity or embrace their 'flaws', when women's bodies are public facing they run the risk of at best, being deliberated over and at worst, misogynistic espousals of hatred. This is a confusing time for young women, in which they are receiving disharmonious messaging about their bodies and are invited to pursue highly individualistic resilience strategies. The simultaneous rise of hand-held smart technology, social media usage and popularity around feminism, then, has evoked significant transformations in women's self-production. This involves a continued emphasis on choice and control while acknowledging women's oppression through asserting a shift in language in which overlapping conceptions of perfection, imperfection and resilience (p-i-r) now play a fundamental part (McRobbie, 2020). In what follows, McRobbie's (2020) conceptualisation of the p-i-r provides a useful framework for understanding how the constraining of emerging feminisms directly impacts those invested in digital cultures of feminine self-production, re-securing highly individualised subjectivities.

The Contemporary Individualising Address: The Perfect-imperfect-resilience

Drawing on Michel Foucault's idea of 'dispositif' (1980), used to refer to an apparatus of relations operating at the intersection of life and politics, McRobbie argues that the perfect-imperfect-resilience (p-i-r) exercises power over young women's bodies in relation to emerging strands of popular feminism (Ibid). Specifically, McRobbie recapitulates these interrelated elements as:

> …the 'perfect', which appertains to lifestyle and the terrain of the feminine 'good life'; the 'imperfect', which offers some scope (but within carefully demarcated boundaries) for criticism of and divergence from these ideals; and finally 'resilience', which becomes the favoured tool and therapeutic instrument for recovery and repair. (Ibid, p. 42)

These terms represent mechanisms of self-production and as such, in this section, I lay out the importance of this scholarship to my theoretical framing of how the p-i-r is received and responded to by working class young women, specifically in relation to engaging with staging performances of the self on Instagram.

Notably, McRobbie situates 'the perfect' as a class category, operating through the cultures of popular and social media to extol a middle class vision of beautiful bodies, exciting careers, happy family lives and domestic bliss (McRobbie, 2020, p. 49). My research, however, specifically recasts the perfect in the context of successfully performing youthful femininities on Instagram, in which I suggest an absence of attention to managing the home, motherhood or career progression intensifies the centralising of physical appearance as a core element of 'the perfect' and a tool by which to evaluate young women's worthiness to be visible on Instagram, which I refer to as 'Instagrammability'. I suggest that it is important to note here the resonances between the perfect and the infamous Instagram aesthetic, enjoining young women to negotiate celebrity branding practices to perform their beautified and glamorously adorned bodies against stylish and highly curated backdrops. As such, in the context of my research, I am aligned with Gill's situation of 'the perfect' understanding it as less aligned with neoliberal feminism and closer to the depoliticising postfeminist ethos (2020, p. 16), enrolling young women, especially those from disadvantaged starting points, in intense regimes of self-surveillance. While I wish to

reassert the usefulness of postfeminism, I am also attentive to the wider social context in which an intensity of feminism *in the air* underscores even depoliticised digital displays of the perfect discussed here, as a form of feminine self-empowerment.

The second term McRobbie identifies as relying on a feminist voice is 'the imperfect', which she notes as engaging with the unviability of 'the perfect' and the consequential inevitability of failure, warranting expressions of injustice and new forms of self-care (2020, p. 49). This is consistent with Banet-Weiser's (2018) discussion of how messages of body positivity seek to challenge the containment of women's bodies by urging the subject to love her imperfections, while ignoring power relations that unevenly implicate young women, making those from disadvantaged economic positions more vulnerable to misogynistic espousals of hate, repulsion and violence, across popular media, social media and in everyday life. My thesis draws on these insights to consider the risks at play for working class young women negotiating digital cultures of performing the self, when considering the relations between appearance, self-esteem and class-based shaming.

The third interconnected term McRobbie (2020) observes is resilience, which she recognises as coming to represent a distinctly gendered, therapeutic space dominating popular media discourse. The language of resilience comes about to offset worsening social inequality and the eradication of forms of social welfare as a result of the neoliberal landscape of austerity (Ibid, p. 55). In this context, McRobbie asserts that the ability to 'bounce back' is positioned as a solution to young women's mental health troubles (Ibid). Feminist media scholarship has theorised resilience as a central element of the 'affective life of neoliberalism', where governing modes of 'getting by' work through affective and psychic registers signalling the salience of self-care (Scharff, 2016; Gill and Kanai, 2018). Young women are portrayed as able to acknowledge their own imperfections in order to tolerate disappointments, build self-worth and 'not be bullied by the perfect' (McRobbie, 2020, p. 56). Accordingly, the language of resilience works to emphasize a strong focus on the individual and not the wider socio-political environment. This address to the resilient subject is identified as particularly violent in its valuing of individualisation and self-responsibility, equating shame with dependence (Ibid, p. 66).

The interconnected and contradictory discourses of the p-i-r are present across popular media and social media, producing a highly individualised address to young women important to the theoretical framing of this thesis. Specifically, the p-i-r establishes an understanding of the inevitability of the p-i-r to entrap young women. My research takes on this challenge, examining the applied theatre workshop environment as providing new insights about how this entrapment plays out in daily life and foregrounding participatory performance as a method to disconnect from violent forms of individualisation. In what follows, I turn predominantly to digital media scholarship to draw connections between the scholarship discussed so far and the phenomena of staging performances of a digitally flattened self on platforms such as Instagram. This will provide an important foundation in order to examine the power of sensory theatrical encounters to bring a heightened quality of liveness and presence to deeply cognitive processes of self-production.

Using Digital Media to Stage Performances of the Self

The first half of this chapter has focused primarily on feminist media and cultural studies scholarship concerned with postfeminism and popular feminism to trace continuities and shifts in the contemporary individualising address, illuminating a proliferation of overlapping conceptions of the perfect-imperfect-resilience (p-i-r) (McRobbie, 2020). In this section, I will demonstrate specifically the ways that this literature can be extended to digital media and gender scholarship that is attentive to contemporary feminine digital cultures of Instagram. Before taking this focus, I first aim to illuminate historical, sociological and cultural debates that have sought to theorise cognitive practices of performing the self in everyday life. This scholarship is helpful in providing an understanding of how these practices are intensified in digital planes, working to diminish spontaneous, multifaceted modes of corporeal perception and communication.

Traditions of Staging Performances of the Self

Staging an aspirational and authentic performance of the self is not a distinctly contemporary social imperative. I begin, then, with an account of research situating processes of staging and performance as central elements of self-production, generally in everyday life (Goffman, 1959) and then with specific regard to gender (Butler, 1999) and

class (Skeggs, 1997, 2001, 2004). My emphasis here lies with illuminating long standing sociological debates that seek to explain the phenomenon of thoughtfully cultivated attractiveness as a means of acquiring status.

In the 1920s, new vocabulary emerged in self-help literature with words like 'fascinating', 'glowing' and 'creative', guiding readers to 'stage-manage an attractive front', through grooming, fashion and refining a charming personality (Susman, 1979, p. 79). While some argue this imperative was driven by self-fulfilment through authentic experience (Rieff, 1966; Bell, 1976), others have put a theoretical accent on thoughtfully staging performances, arguing that there is an imperative to convincingly portray oneself in a flattering light, in accordance with societal expectations and ideals (Fromm, 1947; Riesman, 1950; Goffman, 1959).

Erving Goffman (Ibid) argues that performance is part of everyday sociality, observing that through face-to-face interactions we are thrust onto the stage of life. While there are some elements of spontaneity expressed through involuntary facial expressions, hand gestures and speech, performances are staged consciously according to the audience, whether it be family, friends, school or work (Ibid, pp. 48-49). For Goffman, there is no essence of the authentic self waiting to be given expression. The self is not the cause of a social situation, it is a result of scripted social norms that are deeply embedded within the psyche and consequently dictate advantageous ways to act. In this regard, performing the self is a relational endeavour in which being perceived as authentic is something that is achieved rather than innate.

Since Goffman's (Ibid) analysis of the role of scripts in society, many scholars across a wide range of fields and disciplines have generated theories to conceptualise how systems of power script the body, constituting givenness through the production of common sense. Important in the context of my research is Judith Butler's seminal theorisation of gender as shaped through a process by which cultural meanings are inscribed on the body and constituted through an accumulation of repetitive performative acts (1999). Performing one's gender *successfully* – in accordance with social norms – works to provide reassurance that there is an authentic gendered self (Ibid). This naturalisation of bodies, genders and

desires, however, means that performing one's gender unsuccessfully unleashes a spectrum of punishments, both overt and indirect (Ibid). The rewards and risks associated with doing femininity differ depending on who undertakes it, as sociologist Beverly Skeggs emphasises how '[b]eing, becoming, practising, and doing femininity are very different things for women of different classes, "races", ages and nations' (2001, p. 297).

I draw on Skeggs' (2004; 2009) conceptualisation of relationality, to situate processes of staging and performing the self as a struggle to be recognised of value in relation to specific middle class feminine societal scripts. There is a reliance on relationality in order for subjects to determine their proximity or distance to symbolic value. Drawing connections between socially disadvantaged personhood and capacities to put in work to accrue value and authenticate normative femininity, Skeggs' identifies that properties and competencies are differentially available (Ibid). Those lacking in the resources or capacities of symbolic value are situated outside of the dominant symbolic as the constitutive limit of the proper self (Ibid). Understanding staging performances of the self in relation to the accrual of exchange value provides a framework to understand the way classed subjects are enjoined to well thought out regimes of self-monitoring and improvement in order for their bodies to yield the proper discursive information.

As I will discuss in more detail in the following chapter, performance studies scholars have been critical of a sociological emphasis on the discursive information revealed through the analysis of enacting bodies (Schechner, 2013). Instead, the field of performance studies fuses social science with dramaturgy, favouring attention to embodiment, materiality, process, presence and the transmission of corporeal knowledge through everyday performances (Ibid). However, in the contemporary context of the mediated self we can recognise a move towards a more intensely disembodied, discursively constructed self, as social media users are expected to legitimate themselves through a stream of well thought out digital displays. Writing of Facebook, for instance, in a particular context prior to the advent of Instagram, cultural theorist Jeff Pooley (2010) suggests a number of aspects that intensify the self-conscious and intellectual characterisation of self-production, working to diminish the multidimensional nature of sensory interactions between bodies.

Firstly, Pooley observes that on Facebook there is no spontaneity, instead, there is a conscious 'mutual awareness of performance *as performance'* (Ibid). As such, this significantly reduces or eliminates the reflexive spontaneity that Goffman (1959) observed as occurring during face-to-face interactions (Ibid). Additionally, this illuminates the digital intensification of the contradictory preoccupation with appearing both aspirational and authentic. This is conceptualised by Pooley as the 'authenticity bind': the laboured effort to carefully curate impressions to legitimately present oneself in an attractive and charming light (Pooley, 2010, p. 78). As will be accounted for in the last section of this chapter, feminist digital media scholars have examined the ways in which this authenticity bind becomes highly gendered, increasing the load of mental and physical labour for female participants (Hund and Duffy, 2019).

A second feature of Facebook participation that I argue is particularly relevant to contemporary digital cultures of performing the self, is the tendency for users to become gripped by what Pooley briefly describes as 'expressive paralysis' (2010, p. 86). This term is used to describe people who lurk on social media but leave their profile fields empty and rarely, if ever, post a status update (Ibid). In Chapter 5 of this thesis, I discuss in detail how this idea has informed my conceptualisation of a phenomena I describe as 'expressive stasis', a term I use to account for a phenomenon of young women who thoughtfully stage a perfected amalgamation of makeup, outfits, locations and poses, only to be gripped by a bout of inactivity when the captured image does not match the imagined ideal that was previously rehearsed in their mind's eye. In order to lay the foundations for this, I turn to more recent gender and digital media scholarship concerned with Instagram.

Instagram and Aspirational Femininity

This section provides an account of more contemporary digital media and gender scholarship as a framework used in this thesis to understand how social and digital structures of status, power and value shape cultures of staging performances of aspirational femininity on Instagram. First, I address the celebrity influence that converted Instagram's original purpose (as a means of sharing memory keepsakes) into a platform for intensely stylised and curated material for commercial gains (Abidin, 2016, p. 7). This informs an

understanding of how authenticity comes to be re-negotiated on different social media platforms. As on Instagram, femininity came to be constructed, not as a core female self but as a highly staged performance reasserting traditional ideals. As such, in this section, I start to illuminate the resonances between this scholarship and intense practices of control, self-monitoring and improvement promulgated by contemporary mediated feminisms.

Investments in 'aspirational labour' (Duffy, 2017a) and techniques of control and curation are heightened on Instagram, where there is a strong 'fame' element, driven by access to 'following' celebrity accounts and the opportunity to gain followers of your own (Marwick, 2013; 2015; Hearn, and Schoenhoff, 2015; Khamis, Ang and Welling, 2017). The prospect of the everyday user becoming 'Instafamous' became defined by the adoption of a specific type of visual presentation incorporating celebrity practices, mindsets and aesthetics to increase attention and accrue status (Marwick, 2015). While the everyday user may attempt to replicate this branding strategy, Marwick demonstrates that generating Instafame status is exclusively achieved by appearing extremely 'good-looking', glamourous and stylish (Ibid, p. 139). This works to reproduce celebrity hierarchies, with performances of #blessed lifestyles gaining heightened attention (Ibid). Successful participants, a group overwhelmingly comprised of women, have come to be known as professional content creators or influencers.

The work of scholars such as Bishop (2018), Hund and Duffy (2019), and Abidin (2016) suggests that traditional conventions of femininity reassert themselves on social media, as influencers seek to accrue exchange value. For instance, Bishop notes that corporate brands and advertisers tend to reward those who reaffirm a centrality around consumption, fashion, beauty, friendships and romance, '…in the vein of historical bedroom culture of the teenage magazine' (Bishop, 2018, p. 70). Moreover, Hund and Duffy highlight a growing concern for Instagram influencers that defying archetypal notions of femininity could adversely impact online metrics (2019, p. 4994). Consequently, as Abidin poses, influencers are compelled to engage in 'visibility labour,' putting effort, energy and time into their 'self-presentations so as to be noticeable and positively prominent among prospective employers, clients, followers and fans' (2016, p. 5).

In examination of influencer audiences, otherwise known as followers, Abidin asserts that influencers' feeds function as 'real-time billboards to eager watchful eyeballs' (2014, p. 119). Everyday participants, then, come to model themselves after influencers, adopting their own practices of visibility labour in which a highly gendered and disciplined approach to self-monitoring is adopted that, I suggest, seems to characterise participation within postfeminist cultures. However, in times of popular feminism it is precisely in this context that everyday young women aspire towards #girlboss status, accrued through their *success* in staging perfect displays of their bodies and lifestyles. In turn, as Gill notes they are enrolled in anxiety inducing regimes of bodily surveillance and visual self-subjectification of their lives, relationships and environments (2020, p. 16). In this thesis, I draw on these scholarly insights to theorise how visibility labour is reconfigured from the perspective of socially disadvantaged users who are unable to achieve tacit displays of Instagrammability but continue to thoughtfully construct a future perfect self.

Staging Performances of the Perfect-imperfect-resilience

Having introduced the broader shifting theoretical landscapes of contemporary mediated feminisms and digital media cultures of feminine self-production, what follows aims to narrow my focus. This final section focuses primarily – but not exclusively – on a recent study carried out by Hund and Duffy (2019), in which they examine a highly gendered formation of Pooley's (2010) 'authenticity bind' occurring on Instagram. The bind requires influencers to adhere to a new 'visibility mandate', to avoid projecting themselves as 'not real enough' (too perfect) or, alternatively, as too real (or too imperfect). All the while they are to build resilience around the tension between visibility and vulnerability, as, in the words of one of the study's participants 'you haven't made it "til you've been hated on"' (2019, p. 4997). I suggest that this could otherwise be described as staging the perfect-imperfect-resilience, and as such, throughout this section, I extend McRobbie's (2020) conceptualisation of the p-i-r to illuminate how this visibility mandate can be recognised as dovetailing with the individualising address of contemporary mediated feminisms. The study discussed here draws from in-depth interviews with 25 fashion, beauty and lifestyle influencers. I contend that it provides useful insights informing my own examination of

everyday young women engaging with complex and intensive mental labour in the hope of staging successful performances of the feminine self.

Hund and Duffy (2019) contextualise their investigation by noting that in recent times 'high-status users' portrayals of their #blessed lifestyles – from photos of exotic travels and curated fashions to latte art and #foodporn – have drawn mocking critique' (2019, p. 13). Instagram's renegotiation of authenticity discussed earlier in relation to the normalisation of curating highly staged displays of living has come to reignite a social preoccupation with authenticity, however, dizzyingly stage-managing an attractive and aspirational front remains customary on Instagram. Thus, to counteract accusations of fakery, influencers employ strategic moments of candour, to toe the line between being aspirational and authentic (Hund and Duffy, 2019). Though it is not accounted for in this study, I claim an analogy may be drawn between this visibility mandate and how popular feminist languages of the perfect and imperfect work simultaneously (McRobbie, 2020), engendering new and more intense modes of self-monitoring and surveillance.

In addition to Instagram's scrapbooking feature, allowing users to post images that remain on their profile page, in 2016, Instagram introduced a 'stories' feature affording opportunities to post images that remain on one's profile for only 24 hours. Hund and Duffy put forward that this allows influencers to inject fleeting bursts of realness without disturbing the painstakingly picture-perfect stream of posts on their profile (Ibid, p. 4993). In an artless imitation of Snapchat[8] – characterised as a photo-disappearing platform – Instagram stories enable users to capture 'a day in the life' by sharing a chain of simple events that may not ordinarily make it to the users' profile page. For instance, Sasha explains: 'Your Instagram posts are always kind of perfect, I feel like. And then your stories are kind of real life. Like people want to see, you know, things that are real...' (Hund and Duffy, 2019, p. 4993). This is achieved by posting pictures of messy kitchens, awkward dispositions, confessional stories or by chilling in bed without makeup and with messy hair

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[8] For more on Instagram's story feature and how Instagram copied Snapchat see: Wagner K. (2018) 'Stories' was Instagram's smartest move yet, Vox. Available at: https://www.vox.com/2018/8/8/17641256/instagram-stories-kevin-systrom-facebook-snapchat (Accessed: 1 March 2023).

(Ibid). These participants, then, negotiate languages of popular feminism through this highly gendered authenticity bind by performing what McRobbie (2020) describes as the imperfect on their stories and the perfect on their main feed. Sasha's reasoning emphasizes that due to their ephemeral quality, stories have the potential to lessen the pressure to appear perfect (Hund and Duffy, 2019, p. 4993). However, the juxtaposition of the frivolity of Instagram stories works to further legitimise the seriousness of the perfect Instagram posts.

In pursuit of portraying authenticity, Hund and Duffy examine another participant, Libby, as weighing up the risks of defying the expectations of feminine beauty, highlighting the oxymoronic pressure to appear both 'perfect' and 'off the cuff' all at once. For instance, Libby, is noted as worrying that, 'you wanna be a little more real, but if you start posting anything that's not elevated and inspirational/aspirational, people unfollow you because [they think] "Oh, this isn't pretty. I wanna follow something pretty"' (Ibid, p. 4994). The pressure to appear 'without makeup (but still "pretty")' (Ibid, 4996) foregrounds the stories feature as offering little respite, therefore I claim it further evidences McRobbie's argument that while claiming to be supportive of women the feminine-perfect-imperfect mark highly regulative dimensions around socially accepted versions of success and failure. Hund and Duffy illuminate that for influencers, the stakes are high when it comes to performing curated imperfection, a perceived wrong turn could result in financial losses and emotional distress due to ridicule and harassment (2019, p. 4984). While influencers are keen to gain real points, the threat of failing at constrained modes of femininity such as beauty and homemaking seems to be always looming in the background. This works to normalise online criticism set within persistent structures of inequality (Ibid) and, as I suggest, the individualistic languages of resilience that work to uphold them. This demonstrates the limitations of the popular feminist voices underscoring the perfect-imperfect-resilience and the stranglehold culturally valued ideals of femininity have on digital cultures of staging performances of the self.

Hund and Duffy critically illuminate the stressful and mentally exhausting implications of engaging with Instagram. One participant felt uncomfortable and ultimately too awkward using the front facing camera, while another noted, "If I'm not wearing makeup, I'm not going to post [an image of myself]' (2019, p. 4990). This draws attention to the

overwhelming impact of encountering perfected imagery of women in magazines, the *Mail Online* and social media; through participation in this culture of perfection in postfeminist tradition the objectifying gaze is turned inwards. As such, the study notes that several expressed a desire to take a break from the visibility mandate. As Helene shared:

> It kind of has taken a toll on me, and I think that's why I'm naturally backing away from Instagram, without even realizing it, because I'm kind of getting sick of . . . trying to make my life always look [a certain way]. It's a lot of effort when it's kind of not who I really am as a person. So, I . . . feel myself naturally backing off of it, just because I realize how it can be unhealthy for me. (in Hund and Duffy, 2019, p. 4991)

This signals the mental exhaustion of investing in preoccupied mental processes of self-objectification, exacerbated through picturing what the self looks like as one goes about their day and thinking about how it might be staged so as to be posted and successfully received online.

Another feature identified by Hund and Duffy as providing flexibility to present images outside of one's self-brand is the 'multiple accounts' Instagram phenomenon (2019, p. 4992). In the past, users who managed multiple Instagram accounts had to manually log out of a specific account in order to log in to another. More recently, Instagram users have been enabled to log into multiple accounts at once, which can be toggled via clicking on the username on the profile page (Ibid). Easing inconvenience, this feature expands Instagram's consumer base, proliferating the usage of 'finstas', a term used to describe fake Instagram accounts that are set against 'real' accounts to, as Goffman (1959) theorised, stage-manage different self-presentations (Duffy, 2017b; Duffy and Chan, 2019; Leaver, Highfield and Abidin, 2019). Finstas are especially popular amongst young users. In addition to allowing users to segregate audiences, they have also been recognised as an endeavour to protect their 'personal Instabrand', as finstas serve as a place to dump discordant content (Hund and Duffy, 2019, p. 4992; Harmen, 2015). For this reason, it has been argued that finstas provide relief from the highly pressurised aesthetically driven ethos of Instagram, allowing young people to post random pictures and silly videos (Leaver, Highfield and Abidin, 2019). Shah argues that, consequently, finstas serve as a form of rebellion, resisting the 'overly stylized content shared by celebs and so-called influencers' (2017, p. 18). However, as Goffman suggests, any place with two or more people has a performative element, removed

from the spontaneity of live social encounters this feature has the potential to intensify a preoccupation with how one appears across multiple digital contexts. Furthermore, in a similar way to the stories feature, the gaiety of finstas gives prominence to the seriousness that has been bestowed on what has come to be described as 'main accounts'. In this respect, I suggest that finstas are situated as doing the neoliberal self-care work associated with lighting a scented candle or taking a bubble bath at the end of a stressful day. The onus to take a break from the gender regime is placed on the individual in the hope that eventually 'resilience springs into existence as a "bounce-back" mechanism' (McRobbie, 2020, p.37) so that the user has the strength to return to the more intensive conditions regulating their approach to their main account. Particularly foundational to my own theorisation is how key digital features of Instagram such as main accounts, stories and finstas re-instate highly gendered, individualising discourses shaping the production of digital femininities.

Conclusion

The findings of the study discussed above provoke a consideration of the potential risks and rewards of negotiating the feminine perfect-imperfect-resilience depending on who undertakes this address. I claim that the extent of planning, thought and consideration that is required to 'get it right' – in gendered and classed terms – is indicative of processes of disembodiment that occur in relation to an investment into staging an imagined ideal self. This project is not, however, simply concerned with describing the changing landscape of performing the self in the digitally saturated lives of young women. It seeks to examine, through analysis of an applied theatre workshop project, specifically how embodied and collaborative performance practices might complicate these highly gendered processes on both discursive and material planes. Relatedly, there is little scholarship attentive to the points of exchange between feminist media and cultural studies critiques of the individualising address, digital culture and gender, and applied theatre theories and practices. In order to bring these fields into conversation, the following chapter turns to performance studies and applied theatre scholarship to account for the multidimensional treatment of the body in this thesis.

Chapter Two:

Applied Theatre, Embodiment and the Lives of Young Women

Approaching Bodies

In this thesis, I draw from two scholarly approaches towards the body that, principally, can be distinguished as emphasising one of two strands of thinking, considering the extent to which bodies yield either discursive or material information. Firstly, discursively oriented theorisations, as discussed in the previous chapter, tend to read the body in terms of what it signifies, analysing the way bodies perform habits in accordance with regulatory and disciplinary social norms. Additionally, I have been influenced by an approach focusing on the material experiences of the body, encountering it as a lived entity, yielding experiential knowledge of a body negotiating its world. Important to my research is the understanding that despite this distinction, the signifying body and its corporeal experiences are unquestionably linked. Accordingly, in this chapter, I clarify my own approach to the body, turning to performance studies and applied theatre scholarship and practical interventions, to demonstrate the situation of embodied performance practices in this thesis as holding the capacity to attune participants, not only to forces of social construction that regulate the signifying body but to a corporeal sense of these power relations.

When it comes to the body and its interaction with digital cultures of feminine self-production, little attention is given to the material presence and corporeal knowledge that emerges in contexts privileging embodiment and corporeal perception. It is, then, particularly rare to happen upon research that brings feminist media and cultural studies, and gender and digital cultures into conversation with an applied theatre project prioritising material bodies as a central form of knowledge-production. In this chapter, theoretical approaches and practical interventions are situated as offering key tools to examine the outcomes of the workshop project at the centre of this research. Specifically, embodied performance practices are underlined as holding the potential to invoke a heightened awareness of one's corporeality in ways that allow for forceful encounters of presence and connectivity, countering the highly individualising and alienating entrapment of staging perfect performances of the self on Instagram.

Foundational to the discussion in this chapter is the belief held by performance studies scholars Diana Taylor (2003; 2020) and Rebecca Schneider (2001, 2011) that performance participates in the transfer of corporeal knowledge, not expressed consciously by the intellectual mind (Ibid). Complicating this, the first section of this chapter underlines the difficulty of attuning participants to their corporeality as a consequence of cognitive processes overpowering one's senses. This discussion, however, only underlines the urgency to facilitate performance practices that enable physical declarations of presence and connectivity, especially in times of technological saturation that work to intensify the extent to which bodies become alienated from their corporeal registers. Following this, I locate my project in relation to the field of applied theatre. I draw on key theorisations and practical interventions across the practices of Theatre of the Oppressed, Performance Art and Drama in Education to further demonstrate aspects of embodiment that might disrupt the more isolating conditions of staging feminine performances of the self online. The final section of this chapter provides a critical overview of applied theatre projects facilitated by three practitioner-researchers, specifically in educational settings with girls and young women. I demonstrate how these projects contribute to the theorisation of embodiment in my own project. This analysis is intended to illuminate how I have been informed by this literature, as well as identifying limitations within the field.

Bodies, Performance and Corporeal Perception

As noted above, many performance studies scholars situate material bodies as producing and communicating knowledge in ways that transcend the cognitive processes of the conscious mind (Taylor, 2003, 2020; Schneider, 2011). This underlines an understanding of the lived body as constituted multidimensionally and reflexively, producing complex knowledge that arises through its layered sensory and cognitive interactions with interior and exterior planes of existence. Sociologist Diana Coole is attentive to the ways the body experiences and exerts its own knowledge and agency based on its interiority (2007, p. 414). However, she also highlights how its exteriority leaves it open to shifts where slippages of power occur as a direct consequence of outside regulatory forces (Ibid). This provides an understanding of the body as housing agentic corporeal insights, while relying on external social conditions for its constitution (Rowe, 2023). This scholarship points to the utility of re-

awakening corporeal perception in applied theatre contexts to allow participants, not only to explore how social, cultural and political norms condition bodies, but to access how these power relations might be complicated on a corporeal interior level.

As such, I suggest that understanding presence through Taylor's idea of '¡presente!' (2020) provides a useful scholarly framework to comprehend the political power of performance practices attentive to embodied acts. Taylor distinguishes between presence and the notion of '¡presente!' as the latter enacting a corporeally held forcefulness, commitment and determination grounded in 'militant actions, gestures or declarations of presence, performed and displayed before others' (Taylor, 2020, p. 4). These small bursts always engage more than one person and can be found in: an act; a word; an attitude; an act of solidarity as in responding; showing up and standing with; a commitment to witnessing and a joyous accompaniment (Ibid). In this thesis, the theorisation of the young women's participatory performance work observes moments of embodiment, capturing a forceful sense of presence to examine how the live imperative to be present impacts upon interacting bodies, physically and ethically and how this fosters 'powerful ways of knowing and acting on what we know' (Ibid).

Despite the drive to attune participants to their materially embodied existence, Drew Leder (1990) is attentive to the difficulty of such pursuits due to the extent to which we become alienated from our bodies in daily life. Specifically, Leder demonstrates how the dominant thinking mind diminishes an awareness of the body's presence:

> While in one sense the body is the most abiding and inescapable presence in our lives, it is also essentially characterized by absence. That is, one's own body is rarely the thematic object of experience. When reading a book or lost in thought, my own bodily state may be the farthest thing from my awareness. I experientially dwell in a world of ideas, paying little heed to my physical sensations or posture. (1990, p. 1)

This is particularly relevant to the contemporary state of social media participation, in which normalised habits such as endless scrolling and the careful branding of the imagined, digitally flattened self immerses the individual in a deeply cognitive 'world of ideas'. I extend this to Pooley's (2010) suggestion that social media's elimination of the spontaneity inherent in face-to-face encounters intensifies Goffman's (1959) characterisation of self-

production as a strategic and intellectually driven process. This scholarship informs my own theorising of the possibilities of using performance to intervene with the alienating and individualising grasp the 'perfect-imperfect-resilience' (McRobbie, 2020) has on young women's negotiation of feminine self-production online. In particular, I observe how applied theatrical interventions illuminate differences in the experience of the p-i-r and interventions occurring between bodies at a corporeal level. Therefore, in what follows, I discuss key theoretical frameworks that can allow for closer attention to the non-discursive and material aspects of bodily enactment and interaction in applied theatre contexts.

Applied Theatre and Embodiment

A focus on embodiment has been central to a considerable amount of applied theatre work since its emergence in the mid-late twentieth century. This is because, while applied theatre practices are wide and varying in form,[9] they are united through their rejection of traditional theatre settings and, often, script-based approaches, placing emphasis on the live enacting bodies of participants who may or may not be skilled in the arts (Prendergast and Saxton, 2009, p. 6). With attention to specific marginalised communities applied theatre practitioners are often politically or pedagogically motivated to develop work from a place of caring for particular communities (Shaughnessy, 2012, p. xiv). In this context applied theatre transforms spectators into performers, re-sensitising an awareness of their embodied knowledges as a driving force allowing for new modes of connection and intervention (Ibid; Nicholson, 2005).

More widely, the mid-late twentieth century saw an explosion of avant-garde theatre practices that actively questioned the boundaries between performer and spectator, widening the range of what counts as performance and complicating the role of the body in performance (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in Schechner, 2013). In tandem with this, there was an explosion of scholarly thought fusing social science and dramaturgy to examine the role of

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[9] Some of which include: the Theatre of the oppressed, theatre for social change, theatre/drama in education, prison theatre, museum theatre, theatre in health education and theatre for development. For an extensive look at the wide-ranging practices considered under the umbrella of applied theatre see *The Applied Theatre Reader* (Prentki and Preston, 2009) and *Applied Theatre: International Case Studies and Challenges for Practice* (Prendergast and Saxon, 2011).

performance in everyday life. As noted in the previous chapter, social scientists such as Goffman addressed how bodies yield discursive information regarding societal scripts. However, his theories were based on traditional Aristotelian models of theatre that were simultaneously being rejected by avant-garde theatre makers, performers, dancers and artists (Schechner, 2013; Taylor, 2003). From the 1950s, there was an emergence of performance styles that distinctly resisted commercially driven, narrative centred and script based stage theatre, initiating new examinations rooted explicitly in embodiment, exploring the relations between the corporeal body, modes of representation, the event, art, ritual, everyday life and cultural enactment (Schechner, 2013).

In times of political and social upheaval in the 1960s and 70s, feminist concerns manifested in the practice of performance art, a mode of performing the body that expressively resisted the permeance of Aristotelian narrative based theatre traditions (Wark, 2006). Instead, the body was deployed as art material, giving rise to new explorations of representation, process, presence, bodily materiality and impermanence. For women artists, the female body – a site customarily objectified in mainstream media – became a way to challenge social and cultural norms of representation (Jones, 1998). Artists such as Carolee Schneeman and Yoko Ono employed personal feelings, nudity and exposure to dismantle orders of power that were bound up within the hetero-patriarchal silencing and objectification of women. In this way, women artists played a key role in disrupting what counts as performance, underlining the potential of the female performing body to foreground the experiential and make significant contributions to discourses around the politics of representation (Ibid). The discussion of performance art in this section is particularly valuable to my thesis as I extend insights from practitioners and scholars in this field to both the facilitation and analysis of applied theatrical interventions with young women in the context of exploring their experiences of performing the self on Instagram.

Another central shift in theatre's currents was pioneered by one of the most prominent names associated with applied theatre, Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal, who branded Aristotelian theatre as a 'powerful system of intimidation [...] [that] functions to diminish, placate, satisfy [and] eliminate all that is not commonly acceptable' (Boal, 2008, p. 470). In Boal's practice, he critically addressed systems of power inherent in the

organisation of bodies in the theatre, tearing down the fourth wall that traditionally separates the spectators from the actors. As Kelly Howe describes, 'before Boal even talks about how power relations might shape what a spectator says or thinks, he zeroes in on where a body can or cannot move in a theatre — and how those norms articulate power' (Howe, in Howe et. al., 2019, p.76). Advocating for a Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), Boal (2008) employed embodied exploration of societal issues through a wide range of participatory exercises facilitated amongst actors and non-actors in community settings to physically jolt participants from a position of passive spectator to an assertive spect-actor. While varied in their performance processes, here lies a shared commitment between performance art and TO in their mutual drive to find new ways to activate audiences/participants through the reawakening of corporeal registers in order to develop a sensitivity to societal power relations on a non-discursive, material level.

However, James Thompson (2009) has suggested that applied theatre focuses too much on effect, attributable to the recommodification of theatre by specific strands of applied theatre which stressed effecting community based change rather than stimulating affective registers (Thompson, 2009). For instance, in the 1960s/70s, Theatre in Education (TiE) projects were often funded by non-arts bodies and tailored to include more conventional theatrical elements to positively impact young people, addressing issues such as violence prevention, community building, self-esteem, health and sexuality and peer pressure (Downey, in Blatner and Wiener, 2007, p. 100), rather than focusing on creative process or experience.

Consequently, the creative scope and ethical dimensions of applied theatre represents a key area of debate within applied theatre. In a scholarly move away from examining staged events as producing specific measurable outcomes, there was a refocusing on the inclusion of a diverse range of art forms that might bring a corporeal awareness, yielding an affective force (Thompson, 2009; Shaughnessy, 2012; Adebayo, 2015). With a view to resist forces of restriction and manipulation inherent in pursuing positive impact, scholars emphasise the powerfulness of moving beyond predetermined solutions and interpretations, paying closer attention to the sensory to consider the world in a way that encompasses the multiple layers of human perception and interaction (Ibid).

Thompson's model of 'performance affects' (Ibid) is useful to my own theorising of the workshop project as it is attentive to impassioned sensory displays of presence and connectivity. Central here is the stimulation of affect rooted in the body causing a 'shock to thought' (Massumi, 2002), or to be engaged. While he moves away from a straight application of a communicative model of art, Thompson does not deny the embodied experience of consciousness-raising occurring through collaborative artistic processes, rather, he locates its strength to affect (Ibid, p. 6). Drawing on a process Deleuze describes as a series of alliances, he suggests that consciousness is not raised in an intellectual fashion but in a specifically embodied context, creating a transaction between participants (Ibid, p. 96). Thompson's analysis then can be aligned with ideas from performance studies scholars such as Taylor (2003; 2020), who invest in performance for its capacity to bring participants into the present moment, generating dialogue and transferring knowledge between bodies. This underscores the framing of this thesis, which is based on the notion that it is ever more important to carve out spaces for young women to reinvigorate an awareness of embodied perception, especially when the landscape of feminine digital cultures intensifies gendered processes of individualisation and bodily alienation.

In what follows, I turn to the practices of the Theatre of the Oppressed, Performance Art and Drama in Education, illuminating the ways these practices can be employed in applied theatre contexts to sensitise participants to the tensions between their cultural experiences and their material bodies. Theoretical approaches and practical interventions are examined as offering key frameworks for my facilitation and examination of embodied performance work, holding the capacity to disrupt the isolating immersion into a highly regulated feminised 'world of ideas' (Leder, 1990) through participation with Instagram.

The Body in Theatre of the Oppressed

The body is entirely central to Augusto Boal's work. The great number of games and exercises developed in the name of the Theatre of the Oppressed were designed, as Boal writes 'with the objective of making each person aware of his own body, of his bodily possibilities, and of deformations suffered because of the type of work he performs' (2008, p. 128). This approach to bodies provides a useful framework for understanding a range of

notions of embodiment where participants explore, transmit and reflect critically on the relations between their bodies, everyday life, labour and systems of power. Specifically, Howe proposes that in TO there are five overlapping spaces of embodiment:

> the body as speech; the body as concrete material carved by external forces and relations; the body as a stranger to be met; the body made by doing; the body as a way of knowing. (in Howe et. al., 2019, p. 76)

Each of these work to sensitise the participants to forces of social, cultural and political construction and discipline, regulating their behaviours in relation to space, time and other bodies. Often, Boal's work is employed in an instrumental fashion to 'rehearse' social situations with an emphasis on language. It was his later work (Boal, 1994, 2002) that placed more of an emphasis on going beyond telling stories of oppression, focusing more intently on evoking a physical sense of these experiences. As such, I use Howe's identification of the aforementioned spaces of embodiment as a framework in this thesis for understanding the capacity of embodied performance practices to enable participants to transfer both external and interior knowledges.

In further examination of the first, 'the body as speech', it is apparent that it correlates with the performance studies framework introduced in this chapter that stresses the body's abilities to transmit corporeal knowledge (Schechner, 2013c; Taylor, 2003; Schneider, 2011). With some emphasis, for instance, Howe asserts, '[o]ne of the central premises of TO is that the body emits and receives messages, communicates its own language and is language in its self' (2019, p. 76). In Image Theatre, for instance, participants mould their own bodies to form a still image to express thoughts, feelings and memories. Boal uses the term 'polysemic' to describe how Image Theatre is subject to interpretation and can also reflect the interior thoughts, feelings and memories of each observer who looks at them (2002, pp. 138-139). Image Theatre can also involve participants carrying out non-verbal sculpting and moulding of other participants' bodies, holding many possibilities for conversations between bodies, articulating experiences in ways words cannot account for (Howe, in Howe et. al., 2019, p. 76). This scholarship is particularly useful to my interpretation of how physical expression can attune participants to their sensing bodies and their capacity to

transmit knowledge between bodies, contrasting technological processes of alienation and mediatised conditions of individualisation.

Notably, however, Berenice Fisher has illuminated concerns underlining the importance of encouraging participants who identify as women to express their comfort with creating images with their bodies and the physical sensation of being moulded (Fisher, 1993, p. 192). In her work, exploring Image Theatre with Women's Studies students she found that, '[d]isplaying the body was as gender-laden an activity as touching: both could give women pleasure but either might signal vulnerability and danger' (Ibid p. 193). While aligned with Fisher's thinking here, Howe argues that this tension is not a reason to avoid Image Theatre. Instead, it is underlined as a crucial point of departure for analysis (Howe, in Howe et. al., 2019, p. 178) as examining power through attention to one's body is at the core of TO. In this thesis, I take influence from both Fisher and Howe, observing explorations of Image Theatre as allowing young women to assert their bodily autonomy without shying away from its capacity to initiate complex embodied examinations of systems of power.

The second conception of embodiment is 'the body as concrete material carved by external forces and relations' in which Howe notes that 'we act within contours whispered into our muscles, but largely without a sense of our scriptedness' (Ibid, p. 79). This facet of TO signals its capacity to uncover and disrupt institutional and societal norms that determine everyday behaviours and cultural enactments carried out by the signifying body. For instance, in this thesis, I place an emphasis on embodiment in order to examine performance as enabling young women to explore the relations between the way they stage and perform their bodies. I observe how performance can be employed to re-world and therefore re-examine the terms of gendered scripts such as 'the perfect-imperfect-resilience' (McRobbie, 2020), that may not be known or may be ignored due to the normalising and fixing of femininity in the lives of young women. However, going beyond frameworks that take a language centric approach to reading the surface of the body, my examination of these performance outcomes draws influence from scholarship attesting to how TO can also sensitise participants to – as Howe (2019) points out – how these scripts penetrate bodies beyond their fleshy exterior casing.

Taking inspiration from Boal's attention to re-enacting everyday physical gestures, acts and occurrences through his games and exercises, I situate reoccurrences and doublings as important to my mode of exploring how bodies are impacted by external forces such as media narratives and specific technologies. Firstly, I suggest that embodied repetition allows participants to consider how social norms that are negotiated in our cultural and historical worlds get re-negotiated and changed through time. Additionally, by physically repeating the same gesture or action over a period of time, the participant's attention is guided towards the corporeal sense evoked within the interiority of their bodies. The role of repetition and re-enactment in the framing of this thesis will be explored in more detail in the following section on Performance Art. With a focus on TO in this section, the theoretical framing of this research draws influence from Howe when she suggests that while the body is disciplined by the external forces it touches, embodied practice 'can better sensitise us to its touch' (in Howe et. al., 2019, p. 79).

The third entangled notion of embodiment is 'the body as a stranger to be met' (Howe, 2019). This facet of TO speaks directly to my project, as it addresses the ways bodies become estranged by labour, institutions and other societal structures, with Howe asserting that 'TO hosts a process through which we meet (or re-meet) those bodies' (Ibid, p. 80). Specifically, a number of TO exercises explore bodily alienation, with attention to how bodies become half person/half thing in accordance with the social mask that is imposed on the body in relation to the labour they carry out (2002, p. 155). In Boal's exercise 'Making the Mask All-Encompassing', for instance, the social mask invades the entirety of the participant's body, causing them to exaggerate the mask's power over the human's approach to work, the dramatization continues until the mask gains the upper hand and the human dies (Ibid). To give an example, Boal provides the image of a seamstress who sews up her own body (Ibid). This provokes the image of this participant enacting taking their last breath in a way that awakens their corporeal sensitivity to their own breath bringing them into the present moment. In my thesis, I draw on this scholarship to theoretically frame an analysis of how applied theatrical interventions can enable participants to bring a certain level of presence to processes of bodily alienation that occur when staging digital performances of the self.

The fourth conception of embodiment, 'the body made by doing', examines the capacity of TO not only to analyse the practices of the body as a study of its constraints but to stimulate the subjunctive mood by which the body moves 'as if' (2019, p. 81). In Forum Theatre, for instance, the central premise is subjunctive, providing an outlet to reclaim possibility (Ibid). It involves a small number of participants performing a dramatised account of an oppressive societal problem for a larger remaining group of participants (Boal, 2008, p. 117). When the performance is repeated a second time, the audience members are encouraged to stop the action and replace an actor to implement more positive outcomes on stage, the remaining actors then improvise their responses to the protagonist's action (Ibid). Many practitioners and theorists celebrate Forum Theatre for its ability to not simply interpret modes of oppression but to enables rehearsals of possible actions for social change. However, in the theoretical and methodological framing of this thesis, I avoid encouraging participants to rush towards possible alternative futures and instead examine the results of re-enacting the past from different embodied standpoints. As collaboratively working with the same issues from different embodied standpoints, holds the potential for participants to be guided towards expressing interior corporeal knowledge and sensations. This allows for the possibility of expanding their own senses towards the experiences of others, rather than simplistic narrative alternatives – that in the current landscape of popular feminist media, hold the potential to regurgitate individualising languages of resilience.

The final conception of embodiment reflected in TO is 'the body as a way of knowing' (2019). Here, Howe examines Boal's foregrounding of the thinking, knowing and researching body, which correlates with the aforementioned performance studies body of thought that understands embodiment as epistemology. Elaborating on this Howe discusses 'The Image of the Hour', an exercise which involves the facilitator calling out a range of times of day for the participants to embody what they would be doing at those particular times (Ibid). Attention to this exercise is especially relevant for my research as Howe draws on its ability to demonstrate how knowledge accrued by the body 'makes economies of time more legible' (Ibid). More broadly, as I will discuss in more detail in the following section, I extend TO's capacity to enable critical examinations not only of what the body remembers but 'what is dragged along with it, when time returns' (Schneider, 2011, p. 5).

In summary, this framework provides a number of conceptual tools to analyse how participants become attuned to their sensing bodies to engage in dialogue, debate, reflection and knowledge production from an embodied standpoint. This is particularly crucial for my thesis, as it provides a framework to understand the value of applied theatre practices to enable young women to re-meet their own bodies and the bodies of their peers during the social media age of heightened individualisation and bodily alienation. In the following section, I critically examine key scholarly ideas concerned with performance art practices that contribute to the theorisation and facilitation of an applied theatre workshop using material embodiment to explore contemporary cultures of staging a digitally flattened version of the self.

Performing Body Art

When women's performance art exploded on to the scene in the 1970s, artists employed their bodies in ways that enacted politicised responses to the scripted containment of their lives. Disrupting the neo-Kantian model of disinterestedness[10], these artists rejected the aesthetical detachment from personal experience and the denial of women as speaking subjects (Forte, 1988; Schneider, 1997; Jones, 1998; Wark, 2006). No longer the mute muse or unimportant model/actress depicted in the male gaze, women in the arts reclaimed agency. Employing as Howe (2019) might assert 'the body as speech' to disrupt existing systems of representation, they critically illuminated and went beyond the politics of the signifying body, creating charged sensory relations that induced jolts to corporeal perception.

Of the wide variety of styles and approaches to women's performance art, it is embodied modes of repetition and re-enactment that most influence my own applied theatre work facilitated amongst young women. In this section, I wish to underline artistic and theoretical conceptions of these approaches to performing the body, examining their capacity to reject the constraints of fixed narratives, valuing the re-enactment of everyday experiences,

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[10] For an elaboration on the theory of disinterestedness see, Immanual Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (New York: Hafner Press, 1951). For Clement Greenberg's incorporation of Kantian ideals see, Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting,' in *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 3: Affirmation and Refusals, 1950-1956* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 85-86.

thoughts and feelings to find new embodied 'languages for representation, new ways of activating audiences and new strategies for intervening in public life' (Keidan, 2004, p. 9). I begin by discussing the practice of North American artist Faith Wilding to contextualise the relevance of these methods before laying out the significance of Rebecca Schneider's (2011) examination of re-enactment in the work of feminist performance artists.

In Wilding's original performance of *Waiting* (1972)[11] she re-enacted a sense of waiting through rocking back and forth while reciting a long list of all the times women wait from birth to old age:

> Waiting for someone to pick me up
> Waiting for someone to hold me […]
> Waiting for my breasts to develop
> Waiting to wear a bra
> Waiting to menstruate […]
> Waiting for my first date […]
> Waiting to be beautiful […]
> Waiting to be a woman […]
> Waiting for him to ask me out […]
> Waiting for him to tell me I'm beautiful […]
> Waiting for the perfect man […]
> Waiting for my baby to come […]
> Waiting for my children to come home from school […]
> Waiting for menopause to come […]
> Waiting for the pain to go away
> Waiting for the struggle to end…(Wilding in Roth, 1983, p. 144).[12]

As an audience member of the original performance in 1972, Jayne Forte observed that it '…served as a kind of consciousness-raising, feeding the group's awareness of the subtle ways in which women are denied an active role in the constructed path of their own lives' (1988, p. 218). Forte suggests that Wilding's repetitive rocking action and reoccurring usage of the word 'waiting' gained momentum circulating a sense of 'the frustration of a woman rendered incapable of independent action or thought' (Ibid). It can be imagined that Wilding's objective was to impel women spectators to stop waiting.

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[11] *Waiting* (1978) was originally performed at feminist art installation and performance space at Womanhouse Los Angeles (Roth, 1983).

[12] For full text recited in *Waiting* see, Roth, M. (1983) *The Amazing Decade: Women in Performance Art. (1970-1980).* Los Angeles: Astro Artz, p. 144

Despite this, when she re-enacted this performance more recently in 2007, renaming it *Wait-with* (2007)[13] Wilding was observed as re-embodied the act of waiting not to signify gendered scripts of passivity or dependency but as a collaborative, corporeally held act of refusal (Shalson, 2013). In extending the duration of the piece, Wilding (in Shalon, 2013) set in motion a communal waiting through the following invitation:

> In this new year, I have initiated a daily practice of active waiting-with – a holy waiting. Every day I meditate on waiting as a productive space between actions, waiting as a space of refuge and becoming, waiting as an active refusal to dominate, to possess, to force production, to consume. […] Please accept this invitation to wait-with me wherever you are.[14]

This exploration of a physical withdrawal from cycles of production and consumption holds particular significance to my thesis, which explores the potential of re-enacting experiences of Instagram to bring a certain level of presence and still to the ever-accelerating digital cultures of feminine self-production. Therefore, the framing of this thesis draws from scholarship underlining with the potential of collaborative embodied performance work to bring participants into the present, during heightened times of screens and wireless proximity, where 'we are rarely exactly "in time" or "in place" but always also capable of multiple and simultaneous elsewheres' (Schneider, 2011, p. 25).

In encouraging participants to explore past experiences, thoughts and feelings through a variety of embodied performance practices, it is important to note my interest is not rooted in observing the recreation of truth or authenticity. As Richard Schechner has argued, 'it is not possible to get back to what was' (1985, p. 50). Recalling an earlier reference made to this line of thinking in relation to TO, I am aligned with Schneider when she wonders, 'not only about the "as if" but also about the "what if": what if time (re)turns? What does it drag along with it?' (2011, p. 5). To further lay out my theoretical approach to repetition and re-enactment, I turn to Schneider's (2011) examination of their strengths and limitations, investigating the critical space of inadequacy and examining what is brought to the present

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[13] Wilding gave a public performance of Wait-with at the Geffen Contemporary at MOCA, Los Angeles, on 11 March 2007, from 11am-5pm.
[14] Shalon (2013) writes that Wilding's, 'An invitation to Wait-with Faith Wilding' was posted on the WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution website on 25 July 2007 by Zachary Kaplan, this webpage is no longer available.

moment when faulty steps are taken in multiple temporal directions. This demonstrates a framework for understanding the value of critically examining the cross-temporal residue of the re-enacted gesture.

This performance studies framework draws on practices of women's performance art, contributing to a long lineage of feminist inquiries troubling the linearity of time. Influenced by Adrienne Rich's idea of 're-vision' of which she writes of seeing texts with new eyes (1995), Schneider argues that the act of looking back through re-gesture, re-affect and re-sensation creates critical distance, allowing for the creation of a new original that meshes together embodied flesh memories from crossing and intersecting temporal angles (Ibid). In this context, re-enactment can make the minutiae of everyday behaviours available for recognition. Borrowing Eugenio Barba's terms, it underlines how these performances of cross-temporal citation trip from 'daily' to 'extra daily' behaviour (Barba, 2006). Therefore, we can draw on the inherent-ness of repetition in daily life to support analysis of 'how the very explicit twiceness of re-enactment trips the otherwise daily condition of repetition into reflexive hyper-drive, expanding the experience into the uncanny' (Schneider, 2011, p. 14).

Elizabeth Freeman (2000), upon whom Schneider draws from, writes of queerness in temporal re-enactment.[15] For Freeman, there is a refusal to accept doublings as merely attempting and failing to recreate the past, instead, there is a focus on the political force of temporal play:

> To reduce all embodied performances to the status of copies without originals [the past as gone] is to ignore the interesting threat that the genuine past-ness of the past sometimes makes it to the political present. (2000, p. 729)

There is temporal transitivity identified here that Schneider argues speaks to the disruptive affective force of the past experienced as 'genuine pastness – *and on the move*, co-present, not "left behind" (2011, p. 15). Through facilitating re-enactments of past experiences in the

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[15] Freeman analyses lesbian film and fashion to conceptualise her idea of temporal drag, arguing that re-enactment facilitates a cross-generational negotiation of the temporal labour in subject formation and sociality. It builds on Homi Bhabha's (1991) theorisation of temporal lag, also described as 'time-lag', a concept he credits to Frantz Fanon's (1996) 'The Fact of Blackness' (Schneider, 2011, p. 14).

workshop project, I am interested in the ways a collaborative embodied sense of what Taylor (2020) describes as ¡presente! might disrupt individualised past experiences of bodily alienation, as well as how the corporeally held pastness of the workshop project might disrupt the future. Memory, as Schneider argues, 'remains a future act: not yet recalled, if also never yet forgotten' (Ibid, p. 22). By exploring temporal play through performances exploring everyday experiences and feelings, I aim to sensitise the participants to the '…zigzagging, diagonal, and crookedly imprecise returns of time' (Ibid, p. 16). Extending performance art practices and theories of repetition and re-enactment to collaborative applied theatre work provides a vehicle to access the disruptive energy of the cross-temporal lived experiences of young women negotiating feminised digital cultures. In the section that follows, I am examine theoretical approaches and practical interventions that offer key tools to analyse the role of embodiment in applied theatre projects that are specifically facilitated amongst young women and girls in educational settings.

Girls' Bodies and Drama and Education

My thesis is driven by a desire to examine the possibilities of providing space in the college environment for young women to collaboratively re-embody experiences and feelings related to performing the self on Instagram. Therefore, I now turn to central arguments made by Kathleen Gallagher (2001) and Christine Hatton (2003), whose original contributions in the early 2000s fiercely advocated for unscripted embodied performance to be taken seriously as an emancipatory practice for girls in educational settings, enabling them to explore their lives, while offering opportunities to playfully revise the workings of gender, culture and identity.

Educator-researchers Gallagher (2001) and Hatton (2003) position drama, or more specifically, improvisation of movement, gesture and speech, as allowing girls to disrupt hierarchies of learning and instead, begin from the self. This is foregrounded on the premise that unscripted performance strategies create opportunities for girls to voice personal experiences, promoting agency and intervening with curriculums constructed through a patriarchal lens. Accordingly, they position drama education in the lives of girls as Boal put TO into practice, transforming students from passive learners to creators of meaning (2001,

p. 5). Following Paolo Freire (1996) and his influence on Boal, a dramatic pedagogical style is adopted by both Gallagher (2001) and Hatton (2003) that is not concerned with a drive towards a correct answer, rather, through embodied exploration, knowledge is generated, transferred, absorbed and valued.

Despite this emphasis on the body, there is less attention to Boal's drive to stimulate corporeal perception and more of a focus on the signifying capacity of embodied performance practices to allow girls to feel their cultural knowledge is valuable (Gallagher, 2001; Hatton, 2003, 2012, 2013). Both Gallagher and Hatton locate the strength of embodiment in the opportunities it provides to perform the body's knowledges and experiences of the social and cultural conditions that discipline bodies. In this way, there is value placed not only on what girls know, but the worlds they travel through, the issues they face and what they imagine as alternative possibilities (Gallagher, 2001; Hatton, 2003). In this research, I am influenced by the capacity of applied theatre to allow participants to bring their cultural knowledge to theatrical creations. Consequently, the theoretical framing of this thesis draws from this scholarship to attend to the ways theatrical interventions allow participants to feel heard and seen. However, I also aim to build on ideas asserted by practitioner-researchers working with girls and young women, through theoretical analysis of bursts of presence and connectivity founded in embodied gestures, actions and attitudes. As it is these distinct qualities of performance that hold the potential to intervene with highly gendered, individualising languages of feminine self-production and technological landscapes that work to alienate bodies.

Research in the field: Three key informers

In the last section of this literature review, I introduce and analyse several applied theatre projects facilitated amongst young women and girls in educational settings by three researcher-practitioners (Hatton, 2003, 2012; Howard, 2004; Ramsay, 2014). Having located the multidimensional theoretical framing of embodiment in this thesis in relation to a wide range of key literature, I believe it is now beneficial to focus on empirical, applied theatre studies that employ embodiment to explore the lived experiences of girls and young women.

Playing in the 'Backyard' of Girls' Cultural Knowledge

In 'Backyards and Borderlands: Some Reflections on Researching the Travels of Adolescent Girls Doing Drama', Hatton explores how girls can use embodied performance processes to play in the 'backyard' of their cultural knowledge and stage their own stories (2003). Using American terminology, Hatton employs the notion of playing in the 'backyard' to characterise a creative process that privileges playful exploration of the perspectives and known worlds of the participants. Taking as a central concern the assertion that performance processes can offer significant learning experiences for girls, Hatton outlines the importance of facilitators familiarising themselves with the social and cultural implications that contribute to how students approach play-making, interpret themes and communicate through particular patterns of dialogue (Ibid). Hatton's work reveals the importance of being attendant to participants' perception of their position in the world. Further, it suggests that any performance practice seeking to address Instagrammability must include exercises that enable critical reflection around presentations of the self, gender and culture from an embodied standpoint.

The practical component of Hatton's research is comprised of two studies. The first was completed over a four month period in Hatton's own backyard, at a girls' school where she taught in Sydney, with 30 participants aged 15-17. The second took place at a girls' school in South London with a single GCSE class, over a much shorter period of time but using the same methodology. A range of embodied techniques influenced by play building (Tarlington and Michaels, 1995) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2004) were used by Hatton to inspire girls to reflect on governing societal norms and their own personal stories (2003, p. 146). There were two phases to the creative process. The first involved collectively playing in the backyard of the group. The participants created embodied responses to images and stereotypes, exploring what is known or inherited about dominant perceptions of girls and women in culture (Ibid). The second phase was centred around the individual experiences of the members of the group. Each girl shared their own personal story in spoken, written and photographic forms, this material became the core stimulus for the creative process (Ibid). Individual participants then directed their classmates in performing parts of their own stories. This allowed the girls to see similarities in their enacted stories

and celebrate different experiences and perspectives (Ibid). The study found that for the girls, seeing their stories performed was crucial to their sense of agency and validation, as it produced learning in which the girls played a core role in what was learned (Ibid). This underscores my drive to facilitate a workshop project where young women can share their experiences and observe difference.

The theoretical framing of Hatton's study focuses specifically on her creative methodology of enabling participants to play in the backyard of their cultural knowledge, however, she does not elaborate on the specific outcomes of this performance work, or the cultural knowledge shared by the participants. Instead, her focus lies with reflective postproduction statements made by the girls regarding the power of performance to restore voice and agency in educational settings. My suggestion is that Hatton's insights could be extended. I argue that examining embodied enactments (group discussion, gesture, movement, spectatorship) can provide more understanding of how gendered subject positions come to be normalised on a wider societal scale and registered on a corporeal level.

The main area of concern for Hatton in the research discussed above is restoring voice amongst girls who are positioned outside of learning, as a consequence of patriarchal curriculums almost void of female voices, stories and perspectives (2003). A more recent study from Hatton (2012) is set in the Facebook era, which she situates as providing new opportunities for young people to express themselves in ways unavailable to them in school or at home. In 'Performing 'Girl' in the Facebook Era: Drama as a Safe Space for Negotiating Adolescent Ideas and Agency' (2012), Hatton addresses the place of Drama education in providing the space for girls to explore the tensions and pressures faced through engaging with Facebook. This theorisation is not, however, based on an applied theatre project carried out with girls. Instead, Hatton's starting point is rooted in the potential of drama to effectively grapple with complexities of successfully performing femininity online. Hatton observes the social expertise needed to succeed in creating and managing content in alignment with the constraints of idealised femininity. However, I suggest that a more nuanced theoretical approach could be reached by considering digital cultures of feminine self-production as explicitly linked to the wider scopic economy in which girls and young women encounter femininities and feminisms, as discussed in Chapter One.

In this thesis, I draw influence from Hatton's emphasis on gaining a better understanding of the worlds participants inhabit by underlining the importance of facilitators understanding feminist media and cultural studies scholarship tracing the continued significance of postfeminism, calling forth intense regimes of self-monitoring, despite the ever-rising popularity of feminism in popular media. This is especially pertinent in the context of my research, but further to this, in a world dominated by screens, I believe it is crucial for applied theatre facilitators working amongst girls and young women to understand how dominant media narratives, such as the perfect-imperfect-resilience intersect with mechanisms of self-production. I suggest the importance of this is further underlined when Hatton writes,

> In current and future drama education research and practice, perhaps the imperative will grow to provide more supportive processes that might help young people develop the resilience and agency to meet the challenges of these new times. (Hatton, 2012, p. 47)

To update Hatton's analysis, conducted some ten years ago, I suggest that it is crucial to attend to how languages of resilience have been co-opted and repackaged in times of neoliberal popular media. Consequently, in this thesis I steer away from discourses of recuperation and repair, instead prioritising sensory theatrical encounters to reawaken corporeal perception and collaborative interpersonal engagement as a means of disconnecting from the individualising address to the resilient subject. A comprehension of how these media narratives operate, laid out in Chapter One, provides a framework to identify similarities and new insights that emerge during the workshop project, when the participants, as Hatton would put it, play in the backyards of their cultural knowledge.

Adapting the Theatre of the Oppressed to explore Eating Habits

Another project I draw influence from is one conducted by Leigh Anne Howard, in which she draws from Boal's techniques, employing them amongst young women to generate critical reflections on eating habits and body image (2004; 2009). Similarly, my research is concerned with embodied performance processes by which young women learn about personal behaviours and initiate critiques of social norms. Further, importantly for my research, Howard critically engages with adapting Boal's techniques, providing a considered

analysis of the value of moulding the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) to meet the specific context of participatory projects.

In this study, Howard interviewed groups of women from Louisiana State University aged 17-25 about their eating habits and how they felt about their bodies (2004). There were around 30 participants in total involved in the interviews, as Howard notes she met with five groups of either five or six participants. To take part in the study, each group had to agree to attend five 90 minute interview sessions. After the interviews, six of the young women decided to continue with the project forming a performance group that would draw from and adapt Boal's techniques to produce a public performance that would enact experiences reflected in the interview material (Ibid). While they set out to explore ideas from group discussions, Howard encouraged participants to explore any changes in their own attitudes and instructed them to keep journals to record observations about the process (Ibid, p. 222).

When it came to adapting Boal's techniques, Howard implemented two specific changes. The first adaption of TO established by Howard was that her analysis of the project would focus on the individual growth of the performer (Ibid). Traditionally, in TO, as previously discussed, performers draw from embodied knowledge and experiences to enact their bodies for each other's interpretation, holding the potential to transfer corporeally held knowledge. However, Howard's analysis was interested specifically in examining what happened to participants as a result of engaging with an interactive performance project concerning eating habits and body image. Adopting a similar method to Hatton, an examination of personal growth was conducted by Howard by focusing primarily on journals kept by the participants and postproduction interviews.

While the exercises of TO are conventionally explored outside of the realms of a script, rehearsals and a production, Howard's second adaption was that exercises from Boal would be reworked to produce a public performance (Ibid, p. 223). On her role in this process, Howard explains that she taught the participants the games and exercises of TO before giving them full creative licence in the development of their performance pieces. While Howard's analytical focus lies with the performer's growth rather than documenting the

performance outcomes of the project, in order to provide an understanding of the diverse range of performance pieces that were generated, she gives an example of a piece of performance art that emerged during the project. In this instance, Howard provides a rare description of this performance outcome:

> In one scene, by way of illustration, a prim and proper persona meticulously set the breakfast table. After painstakingly lining up utensils and determining the exact location of the milk carton, the performer sat at the table, placed her napkin in her lap, scooped grits into her mouth with her hands. (Howard, 2009, p. 72)

The description of this performance, provided by Howard, demonstrates the applicability of TO's explorations of embodiment to be transferred to performance art pieces exploring the re-enactment of everyday behaviour. Specifically, it reveals the value in fusing these modes of performance when conducting an examination of the possibilities of performance to enable in depth explorations of presentations of the self.

Howard's focus lies with the transformative power of adaptions of TO for the performers enacting it, identifying, in particular, how it enabled participants' views on eating habits to evolve. This ranged from being able to talk with friends and family to being less restrictive with their own eating habit, to exercising less negative self-talk around body image and a better understanding of cultural influences impacting everyday eating behaviours (Ibid, p. 230). In this thesis, I am influenced by Howard's scholarly drive to examine adaptions of TO, however, instead of focusing primarily on individual examples of personal growth, my theoretical analysis is also attentive to the power of embodiment to act as a lens to re-encounter their own behaviours in ways that allow to re-meet their own bodies and the bodies of their peers, to counter the more isolating elements of social media participation.

Slapstick Performance and the Feminine Ideal

Alison Ramsay's (2014) practice-based research experiments with slapstick humour in a series of workshops with adolescent girls. This scholarship differs from those previously discussed in this section. While Ramsay is interested in articulations made by the participants during and after the completion of the project, her research focuses more

directly on examining the performance outcomes of the creative practice. Additionally, following Angela McRobbie (2009), Ramsay raises issues of the postfeminist neoliberal policing of the feminine ideal as a point of influence, causing her to explore how girls attending a school drama club might use slapstick comedy to disrupt the regulatory norms associated with femininity. However, similarly to the projects discussed so far, for the most part, the corporeal somatic experience of the body is side lined in favour of the body's signifying functions, as comic performances are analysed in this study in relation to the opposition between the physically comedic and absurd, and what is coded as appropriate and normative feminine behaviour (Ibid).

The research was conducted while Ramsay was working as a teacher of Performing Arts at a school in Manchester, England. This role involved overseeing an extracurricular drama club over a five month period. For Ramsay, this felt like an ideal context to facilitate an eight week workshop project experimenting with the slapstick style as participants would be in a familiar setting in which they were volunteering to participate at the end of the school day (Ibid, p. 375). A core participant group of 12 girls aged 12-13 attended one hour workshop sessions each week. Vignettes of the girls' performance work are woven throughout the analysis constructed through detailed observations and analysis of video recordings made throughout the workshop project. As I will discuss in the following chapter, this methodology informs my approach to theorising the performance outcomes of the workshop project I conducted.

Participants experimented with slapstick humour through a series of games exploring physical comedy, with close attention paid to the girls' enactment of, for instance, vomiting and childbirth, entailing abandonment of regulatory feminine social norms. Most influential to the theoretical framework of my research is Ramsay's attention to the manifestation of an 'unruly spirit' registered through different expressions of absurd comedic physical action that worked to emancipate the girls, allowing them to delight in physical excess and challenge normative conditions of appropriate feminine behaviour (Ibid, 376). This informs the framing of my own research which observes the potential for applied theatre practices to stimulate a disruptive spirit transmitting affect within and between bodies, causing a 'shock to thought' (Massumi, 2002) that challenges exterior structures of regulation.

While there is much more attention paid to the value of the practical performance work, Ramsay's analysis is also informed by interviews conducted after its completion. The interviews focused on the girls' experience of doing slapstick and their reactions to the video footage. It was through this process of re-watching, however, that the emancipation of the performance work was troubled, as the girls, in the role of spectators of their performances, expressed intense disgust and hatred towards their own bodies. These self-berating comments cause Ramsay to consider the tight grasp the feminine ideal has on girls. I am aligned with Ramsay when she argues that despite this, the participants' physical manifestation of unruliness offers a small space of resistance through an embodied opportunity to register fixed realities as open to transformation. However, I feel that there is a missed opportunity to readdress the feminised media landscape at this point of the article. While McRobbie's conceptualisation of postfeminism is situated at the beginning of the study as a source of influence driving the project forward, the link between this individualising media narrative and how the girls critique the mediation of their own bodies is not broached. It is in relation to this lacuna that I situate my thesis, as it that works to bridge the gap between these fields of scholarship.

Having reviewed these case studies, I am particularly influenced by the way the researcher-practitioners discussed in this section emphasise the importance of investigating the ideas, thoughts and worlds of their participants, however, I seek to carry out a more thorough consideration of the media narratives prevalent in their lives. Further, I assert that we must take into consideration the non-discursive and material aspects of bodily enactment and interaction if we are to pursue a deeper analysis of young women's experiences of negotiating the tensions between contemporary mediated feminisms and feminine self-production.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have elucidated a critical overview of theoretical and conceptual frameworks that contribute to the situation of embodiment in this project. Drawing on this scholarship, I approach the performing body multidimensionally, examining its capacity to explore, from the perspective of young women, how feminine social norms condition bodies

and how these manifest on an interior level. A focus on the corporeal holds the potential to surpass intellectual understandings rooted in the symbolic, providing new insights about the female body's interaction with individualised languages of contemporary feminism and feminised media that might otherwise remain unknown. By discussing a wide range of theatre and performance literature, I have illustrated the potential of the applied theatre projects to raise up the cultural experiences of young women while enabling them to reawaken a corporeal sense of presence and connectivity. In this context, exploring the materially experienced body collaboratively provides opportunities to disrupt the isolating and alienating conditions of staging performances of the self online. In the next chapter, I examine the epistemological location of this study and how this informs my approach to conducting and analysing the workshop project.

Chapter Three:

Research Methods: Using Applied Theatre as a Resource to Analyse Young

Women and Instagram

This thesis examines the outcomes of an applied theatre workshop project exploring the pressure to perform the perfect on Instagram. In this chapter, I elucidate how my approach to conducting and analysing the workshop project draws on the theories and practices previously discussed. While the practical outcomes of the workshop project are central to this research enquiry, I prioritise a research methodology framed by observation and critical reflection to bring the fields of feminist media and cultural studies, gender and digital media studies and applied theatre into conversation. Therefore, I draw on understandings of the generative nature of writing about applied theatre work (Nicholson, 2006). I situate the theoretical framing of this thesis as inviting scholars from the varied disciplines to take an imaginative passage into the applied theatre workshop space, keeping the conversations and performances alive through re-interpretation and critical questioning. The methodological design of the research, then, is aligned with practitioner-researcher Sally Mackey's assertion that applied theatre work 'can offer a vibrant contribution to current social "thinking" and literature' (2016, p. 483).

My methods of analysis combine discursive traditions rooted in analysing social and cultural scripts and a sensitivity to performing bodies as yielding material information. I draw from McRobbie's (2020) articulation of the perfect-imperfect-resilience (p-i-r) as an analytical framework to interpret group discussions, performance work and interviews concerning young women's experiences of staging performances of the self on Instagram. The p-i-r suggests a specific kind of entrapment for white, middle class young women. Therefore, I am interested in establishing how it is reconfigured in the lives of the participants who are white, working class young women. Additionally, these critical observations are informed by extending scholarship concerning postfeminist traditions of self-monitoring and self-perfecting to gender and digital media theory concerning negotiations of online visibility (Abidin, 2016; Duffy and Hund, 2019). Going beyond a primary focus on reading these experiences, my approach to analysing the workshop project also attends to the sensory

realms of embodiment. As such, the analysis of performance vignettes draws on performance studies literature (Schneider, 2011; Taylor, 2020) addressing bursts of presence and connectivity founded in actions, gestures, declarations, attitudes, witnessing and accompaniment. In this chapter, I elucidate how I adopt a mode of analysis described as a polyphonic conversation (Mackey, 2016) between the discursive and the affective, theory and practice, action and reflection.

To set out the scope of the research, I will first describe the fieldwork site, locating it as a rich context to explore young women's engagement with Instagram. I then elucidate my approach to conducting the workshop project, with attention to applied theatre practice as a knowledge generating tool and a key resource for analysis. I explain how applied theatre contexts foster moments of exchange between the practitioner-researcher and the participants, allowing for collaborative approaches to designing the research. Importantly, then, I will reflect on ethical issues of positionality, power, hierarchy and interpretation. Finally, I elucidate how the idea of polyphonic conversations (Mackey, 2016) is employed as an analytical method to examine the multifaceted and interdisciplinary nature of this research.

Locating the Research

I noted in the introduction of this thesis that I first became interested in this area of enquiry while working as a Teaching Assistant and then Drama Teacher at a High School for young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) in Liverpool. Insights were garnered during this time in which I observed girls aged 13 to 18 glued to their phones, incessantly scrolling on Instagram, while assessing and comparing female bodies, considering cosmetic surgery, longing after apparel and critiquing their peers. As previously discussed, Instagram was a dominant and reoccurring theme in discussions and disputes between students and therefore was primarily viewed as a hindrance to learning. Specifically, I was motivated to counter an avoidant and individualistic approach that either shut down conversations or separated quarrelling students. In Drama lessons, I introduced social media as a theme to explore through improvisation modules, where the students could work together to examine related thoughts and feelings. Practical interventions allowed me to test how embodiment might be used to explore participation with Instagram,

while gaining a greater understanding of its potential to disrupt individualised subject positions. These explorations were carried out within the confines of curriculum-based learning, which meant that they were constrained by a number of elements. This influenced me to carry out research involving applied theatre workshops that would be located in the school environment but outside of the curriculum. This would enable a level of freedom with regard to the selection of theatrical approaches, topics of exploration and allow students to have control over opting in or out.

I successfully secured a Liverpool based performing arts college as a research site for this enquiry.[16] As I have previously noted and will go on to explain in more detail in this section, I embarked on three separate workshop projects based at this research site. However, the main component of this research is the analysis of the outcomes of a single project carried out amongst a group of ten young women studying Acting. Despite disruptions to original research plans, the outcomes from this project were particularly rich in providing new insights around how the perfect-imperfect-resilience (McRobbie, 2020) plays out in the lives of working class young women and the way in which, consequently, it manifests a particular sense of dissatisfaction. Additionally, this workshop project provided significant insights demonstrating the possibilities of applied theatre practice to intervene with modes of technological alienation and highly gendered discourses of individualisation. Thus, the analytical process has involved thinking and writing about group discussions, practical outcomes and interviews from an interdisciplinary perspective. Further to this, the research is framed in relation to the wider research context which I examine in this section through a process of 'loose ethnography'.

It is important to clarify that the phrase 'loose ethnography' is a move away from the strongest sense of ethnography, which is traditionally used to describe long-term immersion within the research setting (Allen, 2008, p. 63). Instead, loose ethnography is used to refer to primary methods of ethnography, such as observation and informal interviews with staff. I utilised this method to carry out what Clifford Geertz (1973) describes as 'thick

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[16] I obtained approval from the Goldsmiths, University of London Theatre and Performance Department to facilitate extra-curricular applied theatre workshops amongst girls and young women aged between 16 – 25 in educational settings.

description', to garner a strong awareness of the structures and established cultural codes present at the research site. Observing the daily practices and processes at the research site enhanced my understanding of the participants' social situation and experiences. Additionally, it provided a vital basis for building participant-researcher relationships. What follows provides a detailed account of the loose ethnography carried out within the wider research context.

Locating the Research Site

The research was carried out at performing arts college based in central Liverpool. Due to this location, the students are also exposed to Liverpool's heightened cultures of beauty and fashion. This is grounded in their exposure to everyday performances of spectacular femininity by girls and women who inhabit the city and the omnipresence of salons and beauty emporiums. For instance, Harvey Nichol's Beauty Bazar, launched in 2012 based on the city boasting the highest per capita spent on beauty and grooming in the country, more than three times the national average (Walker, 2012). Following Skeggs' (2004) influential work on the relations between class and femininity and Dosekun's (2020) work on postfeminism, spectacular femininity and transnational culture[17], I have an analytical interest in heightened appearance culture in Liverpool as a site for pleasure and strength, as well as a site for regulation and surveillance. The normalisation of heightened attention to one's appearance in Liverpool provides an understanding of the wider context in which the participants of this research are located. I regard the research site's relational situation to the performance of spectacular femininities as significant to examining the research participants investment in carefully staging performances of the self on Instagram.

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[17] Simidele Dosekun (2020) has analysed postfeminism in relation to 'spectacularly feminine' women in Lagos, Nigeria. In particular, Dosekun analyses how young Black women are de-politicised as a consequence of equating feminine power with hyper-visible displays of hyper-femininity, such as long flowing weaves, heavy and flawless make up and immaculately manicured nails (Ibid). This analysis of postfeminist self-production across cultures and class informs my own research, specifically, as this project occurs in Liverpool – a site with a long history of working class women using heightened beauty practices to gain access to blocked opportunities. Particularly relevant then is Dosekun's attention to classed challenges to attaining spectacular femininity, contributing to a nuanced understanding of feminine self-production as providing new opportunities and limitations for those who partake in these practices.

Gaining Access

In the initial stages of pursuing access to the research site I corresponded with key contacts, including the head of student experience and head of year. I shared an introduction to the research and project outline, detailing what it would involve for the institution and the participants. Following this, initial meetings were set up with the head of year and relevant teaching staff. All the staff I encountered expressed a great sense of enthusiasm for the project. The key contacts I corresponded with spoke at length about their concerns around the impact of social media on the lives of young people, especially young women and girls. These concerns had arisen in connection to both social media 'drama' causing upset amongst students in the college environment and educational based discussions focused on plays or performance pieces that had veered into talks of the pressures to post pictures of the perfect body and life on Instagram. Additionally – signalling the prominence of popular feminism – they also voiced a rise in their female student's interest in feminism and gendered issues impacting them.

My initial enquiries were met with some hesitancy around the prospect that the project could exacerbate social media 'drama' in ways that might distract from college work. This point of hesitation was intriguing. A tendency to avoid allowing young women to address issues collaboratively is compatible with sexist individualising discourses of female competitiveness and languages of resilience. Complying with these discourses works to emphasise harmful neoliberal feminist narratives of self-responsibility and actualisation. In conversations with key contacts, we ultimately agreed that engaging with social media can be extremely isolating and therefore young women deserve to take up space outside of the curriculum where they can be physically present together, to share in experiences through discussion and performance.

Having obtained authorisation from key contacts I set out to familiarise myself with the organisational structures and informal cultures of the college. The staff were extremely flexible, and I was reassured that I could spend as much time as necessary observing college life and a variety of classes ahead of the research. Methodologically, this proved highly beneficial to gaining a fuller understanding of the workings of the research site. Between

September 2019 and March 2020, I visited the college twice a week. Before conducting the workshops, I spent around two months with each group, observing classes, where I occasionally led or joined in with warm up exercises and sat in group discussions. In deciding to take part in classes, I had to consider that it might impact the students' perception of me, in relation to the social hierarchies between teachers and students. However, it felt most ethical to create opportunities for students to get to know me and experience how I worked before deciding to participate in the extra-curricular workshop projects. During classes, I made sure I left the teaching and academy protocol to the teachers. In the initial four months, I spent most of my time with a group of students studying Acting. After completing the first workshop project, I carried out a two month observation period with a group of Musical Theatre students and another group of Acting students. Additionally, I informally interviewed key educational staff and generally 'hung around'. This period was particularly valuable as I became familiar with the students, the academy setting and I gained insight into the regularity in which discussions around Instagram surfaced both in educational discussions, and more generally, outside of the curriculum.

The Research Participants

The insights gained from initial observations outlined above confirmed that the college was a highly suitable research setting for an applied theatre workshop project exploring young women's engagement with Instagram. As noted, I initially set out to carry out three six week workshop projects, however, this was not possible due to school closures that occurred across the country from March 2020. At this point, I had completed one project with ten Acting students, I was two weeks into another project with seven Musical Theatre students and in preparation to begin to work with another group of Acting students. Consequentially, what follows will focus primarily on the outcomes of the workshop project with ten Acting students aged 17-18. Though, when discussing the socio-economic positioning of the participants, I will refer to some insights gained from time spent with Musical Theatre students in order to demonstrate how social class is split across course subject lines.

After spending a two month period observing Acting classes, I informed the students about the research project and handed out information sheets. Ten young women in the class

signed the information sheets and returned them to me. The participants were given my contact details and encouraged to contact me with any further questions. At the college the students' academic week came to a close on Thursday's at 12pm, and for that reason workshops were scheduled to take place during their free period on Thursday afternoons. Key members of staff authorised the dates for the six week project. The workshops took place between November 2019 and early January 2020. Each session was an hour and fifteen minutes in length. Workshops took place within the college site, held in a large studio room booked for this purpose, ensuring that we would not be disturbed by staff or students. All participants were made aware of the rigorous framework around anonymity and confidentiality, in which their privacy was protected by assigning them another name and anonymising key identifying characters.

Participation in the workshop project was completely voluntary. The young women who took part put themselves forward based on their interest in the project. The criteria for participating was a desire to use a range of performance practices to explore their engagement with Instagram. In addition to factors such as COVID 19 that impacted upon the sample size, the final decision to focus on the first study was influenced by an epistemological framework combining feminist poststructuralist (Haraway, 1991) and performance studies methodologies (Taylor, 2003, 2020). This involved using the outcomes of the applied theatre workshop project as a resource to examine situated and partial knowledges, related to a specific group of young women, in a particular location, rather than aiming to produce generalised or replicable data. During my time at the performing arts college, I found that the student body was lacking in racial diversity. Subsequently, all participants were white. Despite this limitation, I was able to place an emphasis on their social positioning. The location of the young women as white and working class is particularly significant to my re-examination of how the perfect-imperfect-resilience operates in the lives of young women, as previously noted, it is an address that has been examined as more directly aimed at white, middle class young women. Therefore, in the remainder of this section, I elaborate on my approach to evaluating the social positioning of the participants.

One way to contribute to mapping the wider socio-economic context of the participants would have been to ask them to provide specific information such as their educational history and their parents occupations. However, being overly dependent on economic details has been acknowledged as highly problematic. For instance, Reay *et al.* claim such 'simplistic divisions convey only a fraction of the story of social class' (2005, p.16). This line of inquiry is heavily influenced by Pierre Bourdieu's (2010) conceptual model of class which does not solely foreground economic difference, rather he stresses the significance of three different types of capital: economic, social and cultural. For Bourdieu, these three categories are undeniably connected, through their subtle differences complicate the overly simplified traditional reliance on the economic based distinction of class (Ibid).

I acknowledge that economic information can play a significant role in painting a picture of participants' situation in the world. However, having read accounts of studies where young people were left feeling unsure of their parents' occupation for various reasons, it did not align with my ethical standpoint to put participants in a potentially uncomfortable and vulnerable position at the outset of the research. Therefore, my understanding of the students' social class relied on a stronger focus on social and cultural life through locating the educational site, conversations with the class tutor, class observations and, most prominently, conducting the workshops. Through my time with the Acting and Musical Theatre groups it became clear that class-relations existed within the institutional structures of the academy, as I will go on to explain.

Distinguishing the participants' class location involved reflective consideration during and after the fieldwork. With consideration of the research site, all the participants shared similarities in terms of socio-economic positioning, as at the time of the workshop project, they all attended a state funded institution situated within an urban area. To gain a place at the college, prospective students must audition successfully. On an academic basis, there is a requirement to achieve at least four GCSE's at Grade 4 or above (the equivalent of a low C). In terms of academic entry requirements, this is on the lower end of the spectrum, creating a mixed ability environment. Some students who did not achieve Grade 4 or above in Maths and English are required to retake additional classes and testing in these subjects. It was confirmed in the research that the participants could not afford to attend private, fee-paying performing arts institutions. However, there was a variation between the socio-

economic backgrounds of the participants, and subsequently they are categorised in this research as either working class or lower middle class.

As noted in the introduction to this section, class difference was largely split between subjects, meaning the working class participants came from Acting, while the majority of participants studying Musical Theatre were lower middle class. The social economic differences between these groups are reflective of the additional cost of training required (dance, singing and acting classes) to successfully gain entry to Musical Theatre college courses via audition. It is also indicative of the socio-economic status of the boroughs of Liverpool from which the students travelled to the college. Naturally, over the course of the workshop series, the participants discussed the North West boroughs in which they lived. In the Acting group all the participants were from more socially disadvantaged areas. Whereas most of the Musical Theatre participants travelled from more socially privileged areas. These insights were reaffirmed by class teachers.

A lack of economic mobility was a recurrent topic amongst the Acting participants. As I will discuss in the following chapter, many of the young women referenced not being able to afford new outfits, which seemed very distressing due to the pressure not to repost the same outfit twice on Instagram. This is reflective of their age and situation in full time education, however, there was a notable difference between these assertions and those of the Musical Theatre participants, who spoke more freely of buying new outfits in preparation for trips to London and Paris. This is indicative of the increased economic limitations impacting the Acting participants in comparison to their peers. Congruent with this, the Acting participants spoke more frequently of their part-time jobs, which involved working at restaurants, in retail and fast food chains, used to support their fashion and beauty pursuits. These insights regarding the participants' social location are particularly significant to my analysis of their engagement with highly gendered and classed discourses of performing the perfect on Instagram.

Importantly, I would like to state that my aim is not to provide an exact measure of the participants' social class. Informed by the feminist scholarship from Beverly Skeggs (1997), which builds on Pierre Bourdieu's model of class, the analysis in this thesis is attentive to the

way class emerges culturally and socially, specifically, in relation to their location and gendered social scripts. While Skeggs' scholarship applies a greater depth of focus on class than my own, I extend her commitment to understanding the partial and constructed nature of lived experience in relation to the socio-economic structures whereby gendered experience is produced (Ibid, p. 27). To understand young women's experience of performing femininity, for instance, she examined the material qualities of getting ready and going out, as well as the classed and gendered systems constituting and regulating the way the self can be performed (Ibid, p. 98). In this research, I foreground the analysis of group discussions, performance explorations and interviews to provide a complex and nuanced understanding of young women's negotiations of staging and monitoring performances of the self on Instagram.

Conducting the Workshop Project

In Chapter One of this thesis, I outlined how scholars identify social media as intensifying strategic negotiations of online visibility, normalising postfeminist modes of self-monitoring and surveillance. Angela McRobbie posits that it is the standardisation of such practices that stifle a critical voice pertaining to how expectations and requirements come into being (2020, p. 51). Drawing on the scholarship of psychoanalyst Adam Phillips (2015), McRobbie suggests that if we are going to disrupt these highly gendered and individualised languages then we might turn to 'the interruptive and complexifying power of literature or clinical practice' (2020, p. 52). These outlets are identified as being able to dislodge the notion of a self-standing subjectivity by offering an array of perspectives and a multiplicity of ways to understand the self. While these methods might help to communicate a wider variety of perspectives, I observe a sense of individualism that undergirds the acts of meeting with a psychoanalyst or reading literature.

In what follows, then, I focus on the epistemological value of applied theatre as a resource for analysing embodied and collaborative ways of knowing. Not only am I attentive to its capacity to disrupt what is known as a consequence of individualised subject positions but I examine the space created for participants to have a say in the way they are researched.

Importantly, I go on to consider the ethical dimensions of issues of positionality, power and hierarchy.

Applied Theatre as a Knowledge Generating Tool

As noted, my thesis is methodologically framed by my observations of the workshop project. In this section, however, I turn to theatre and performance practice as research (PaR) scholarship to underline the unique insights that practical applied theatre work can produce. Specifically, I discuss the value of applied theatre practice as a knowledge generating tool and a key resource for analysis. Practice is positioned here as a research method within a wider context of my own observational techniques, which I extend to group discussions, interviews, practical explorations and the participants' reflections on that practice.

Applied theatre scholars have argued that the nature of their participatory work, embedded in community settings, intensifies a sense of unpredictably underscoring the embodied standpoint of all those involved, in contrast to traditions of theatre and performance PaR that usually emphasise a focus on the embodied artist-academic (Mackey, 2016, p. 482). Instead, applied theatre PaR focuses on the multiplicity and spontaneity of the participants' voices and enactments in relation to the microcosm of society they comprise (Ibid). Therefore, applied theatre contexts hold significant possibilities for participants to disconnect from highly gendered individualising languages, promoting self-surveillance and self-sufficiency. Additionally, similarly to Hughes *et al.* (2011), I am attuned to the epistemological value of the complex and messy research contexts inherent in applied theatre scholarship. In this research, I adopted an approach to conducting the workshop project that marked out space for the participants to raise the key themes that they would explore. These themes would then inspire which practical explorations I selected for them to interpret. In my analysis of the workshop project, I also made space for observations of spontaneous moments outside of my plans, positioning embodied unpredictability as enriching the research process. I will discuss my approach to navigating issues of positionality, power and hierarchy in the sections following this one. In the remainder of this

section, I will focus on three decisions I made regarding my approach to conducting the workshop project before it began.

The first decision relates to a generative research question determined ahead of the fieldwork: what can practical interventions tell us about young women's negotiations of performing the perfect on Instagram? Consequently, I located group discussion and collaborative explorations of gesture, movement and re-enactment as central to exploring lived experiences with the participants. Drawing on Drama in Education case studies discussed in the previous chapter (Hatton, 2003; Howard, 2004; Ramsay, 2014), I situated these unscripted performance strategies as creating opportunities for young women to re-world their experiences of Instagram, using embodiment and liveness to re-visit personal behaviours and initiate critiques on social, political and cultural life. Second, I drew from and reimagined aspects of the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) and Performance Art to not only explore how social and cultural norms regulate the performance of the self on a surface level but going beyond this, how these systems of power can be sensed corporeally. Third, I positioned embodied explorations of repetition to create opportunities for participants to consider how social norms might be negotiated and re-negotiated in cultural landscapes over time. As noted in the previous chapter, as a facilitator, I have found that through embodied repetition participants' can reawaken corporeal knowledge, expanding their own senses towards their own experiences of those expressed by others.

These decisions were underscored by a research hunch that themes of gendered individualisation and technological alienation might be significant. However, it was not until I conducted the workshop project that I understood the significance of these themes in relation to the participant's social location and the subsequent potential of embodied ways of knowing in this cultural landscape. Before discussing how key themes raised by the participants impacted the facilitation and analysis of this thesis, the next section will focus on ethical issues of power and hierarchy related to my positionality as the practitioner-researcher.

Processes of the Practitioner-researcher

To address important epistemological questions of power and hierarchy in relation to interpreting the outcomes of the fieldwork, I practised practitioner-researcher processes of critical assessment and reflection, continually examining my position within the workshop project. This involved questioning the assumptions, values, experiences and knowledges I brought to the workshop design, facilitation and interpretation, considering precisely how these factors impact knowledge production.

In particular, I was sensitive to social hierarchies that impact interaction. I reflected on my place in the world as a feminist academic who is white, lower middle class, young (however, from the participants' perspective older) woman who presents as mentally and physically able in a world systematically governed by racism, physical and mental disadvantage and poverty. Additionally, I considered how my inward positioning influences the shaping of experiences and feelings expressed by participants. Although I present as able, I have a diagnosis of ADHD, a neurodiversity that went untreated until age 17. After my diagnosis, the support I gained helped me to progress in everyday life and in education. Prior to this, my school years were extremely turbulent, resulting in two exclusions. During this period of internal and outward chaos in everyday life, I found social media to be a place where I felt I had control over the projection of my image and character. Foundational to this project then is my own experiences as an adolescent, who utilised social media as a platform to prove that I could meet society's gendered standards. My experiences also make me empathetic to those who struggle in a typical academic environment and who, consequently, find refuge in the drama studio, where large amounts of energy and spontaneity is met with delight and applause rather than horror and disappointment.

Through critical reflection I came to examine my own social movement and mobility. I reflected on the disjuncture between my tumultuous school days and the success I have had in my academic career since gaining the necessary support through a diagnosis of ADHD. Another disconnection from the location I was born into and my current situation within academia as a PhD researcher and associate lecturer is that neither of my parents went to university. Such mobility has brought forms of power, privilege and capital that were

formerly unreachable into being. Further to this, it was entry into higher education that endowed me with feminist knowledge and understanding that I had not yet previously been exposed to. Ultimately, this knowledge allows me to understand many of the girlhood anxieties I battled with as a teenager and fosters a critical stance in response to postfeminism and many strands of popular feminism. Thus, I am alert to the distance between the participants' social locations and my own.

In terms of breaking down barriers between the researcher and the participants, British sociologist Ann Oakley has argued that positive interaction is possible when,

> the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship. Personal involvement is more than just dangerous bias – it is the condition under which people come to know each other and admit others into their lives (Oakley, 1981, p. 58).

While this argument is made with specific regard to interviewing participants, it proved to be particularly useful in the facilitation of the workshop project. For instance, at the beginning of the observation period at the performing arts college, I introduced myself to the Acting class and informed them that I had attended the college to study Acting when I was their age. This allowed me to identify a core similarity between us, that my college performance training echoed their own. My willingness to open up about my experiences with the participants helped to build trust and comfort.

During the workshop series, more similarities emerged, which contributed to the forging of relationships and helped to rebalance the power dynamic. Several of these shared experiences related to negotiating feminine digital cultures of visibility on social media. Relevant here, then, is Drama in Education practitioner researcher Christine Hatton's concern that 'daily many young people are facing tensions, challenges and pressures unlike anything their parents or teachers have ever experienced or can imagine' (2012, p. 37). However, I note that my presence in social networked spaces (MySpace, Facebook and Instagram) during my teenage and young adult years provides me with a tacit understanding of these processes. This allowed me to build a rapport that would perhaps not have been possible for those adults who are, as Hatton suggests 'in catch up mode' (Ibid). During group discussions, this insider information allowed me to fill some of the gaps in conversation or

incomplete sentences, where there was an assumption on behalf of the participants that I obtained knowledge of these experiences. Plummer has described this as the 'you knows' of conversation (2000, p. 91). However, as Reay warns, it is crucial not to put your own words into the mouths of participants (2005). With that said, I acknowledge the delicacy of negotiating a process of identification that is sensitive to difference as well as similarities.

Notably, engagement with smart technologies has intensified significantly since I was a teenager. Between the ages of 13 and 16, I would access MySpace via the family computer, which I shared with three other people. This meant I would be online for a portion of most evenings and at the weekend. Even when I got a smartphone at age 16, WIFI was not readily available as it is today, which meant that I would have significant enforced breaks from usage. Today, smart phones and unlimited data are customary to the point where the smart phone can be seen as an additional limb in the hands of young people. Instagram has reigned dominant since 2012, such that many participants spoke of not remembering a time without Instagram. These reflections highlight the danger of assuming sameness and the problematic potential to obscure differences due to the knowledge of my own experience and location.

During our first meeting to informally discuss the project and hand out information sheets, I directly addressed differences in our social location by asking if any of them knew what a PhD involved. To soften this power laden address, I assured them that it was not something I was aware of when I was their age. In response to my question many of them shook their heads unknowingly, while a few hazarded a guess. This provided an opportunity to explain in more detail the process they would be participating in, including activities that would take place outside of the classroom, such as transcribing, the writing up process and the presenting of the research at conferences in the future. This conversation positioned me as the conceiver of the enquiry, the documenter and the analyst. However, it was extremely important for me to communicate that I was motivated to approach the topic of performing the self on Instagram through modes of co-creation. I voiced this by emphasising that our explorations and my analysis would be led by thoughts, experiences and themes raised by them. The idea that they would be contributing to knowledge was very exciting for the young women. Additionally, throughout the process, they voiced the importance of people

learning about the difficulties of participating with Instagram via those experiencing them. In contrast to vanguardist forms of knowledge production, whereby a scholar formulates theories around a social group based on a self-formulated theoretical position (Firth and Robinson, 2016), group discussion, performance and interviews are situated in this research as anti-oppressive methods, activating open approaches to knowledge production.

This section has provided the reader with a critical understanding of my situation in relation to the research. Exploring the similarities and differences between myself and the young women, highlighting the values and assumptions I bring to the project and how they inform the facilitation and interpretative process. While I feel it is crucial to provide this elucidation, it is important to note that no level of critical reflection and participant collaboration can completely eliminate issues of privilege, hierarchy and power. In what follows, I continue to examine the complexity of the practitioner-researcher role in relation to polyphonic research methods that consider both the potential of weaving perspectives to form co-ideas and the ethical dimension of such collaborators also being the subjects of the research.

Polyphonic Conversations: Sharing the Production of Knowledge

Research centred around analysing the experiences of women from a feminist perspective has raised epistemological concerns related to the following critical questions: 'who knows what, about whom and how is this knowledge legitimized' (Maynard and Purvis, 2013, p. 18). These epistemological questions are of centrality to the methodological framing of this research. I extended a feminist desire to enable participants to contribute to research agendas and have a say in the way they are studied (Skeggs, 2001) to the design of the workshop project. In an attempt to continue to respond to wider epistemological questions of positionality, power and hierarchy, in this section, I am attentive to scholarship addressing the ethical dimensions of sharing in the production of knowledge in applied theatre contexts.

It is worth outlining here some critiques that focus on the embedded hierarchy in the terminology of 'applied theatre', as they contribute to operationalising modes of collaboration between the researcher-practitioner and the participants. For instance,

Mojisola Adebayo raises the concern that applied theatre implies that '[t]he applier is the one who is in action, the recipient, the applied to, comes second' (2015, p. 125). James Thompson refers to this as a 'mistaken hierarchy', whereby a heightened attachment to the practitioner-researcher's ideas and intent fails to acknowledge affective jolts to engage with planned workshops and the weight of unplanned and spontaneous happenings (2009, p. 3). To resist against forces of restriction and manipulation inherent in pursuing a particular impact, my methodological process is aligned with these scholars emphasis on the power of moving beyond predetermined solutions and interpretations, paying closer attention to the sensory to consider the world in a way that encompasses the multiple layers human perception and interaction (Thompson, 2009; Shaughnessy, 2012; Adebayo, 2015).

In developing a workshop project that seeks to embrace unpredictability and actively integrate the participants into the design process, I turned to applied theatre practitioner-researcher Sally Mackey's (2016) concept of 'polyphonic conversations'. Describing this Mackey writes:

> Such a metaphor offers a productive capaciousness for embracing the complexities of the field. Polyphony suggests a number of different voices participating in the overall project, frequently following their own routes and independent needs, sometimes harmonious and occasionally not. Within this polyphony are moments of homophony, where all voices join together into one clear and combined melodic line. There are also moments of monophony, where singular voices can be heard quite distinctly, as is the case so often in conversations. A conversation has a topic, a focus, matter. In utilising this metaphor, immediately the subject matter of the research is centrally positioned, therefore, the 'conversation' is about the research focus (2016, p. 486).

Countering the essentialist limitations of a sole focus on the practitioner-researcher's intent, Mackey asserts that the power of applied theatre lies in its prioritising of people engaged in arts practice which allows for the research processes to be shared with many voices contributing to the co-creation of ideas, themes and practical explorations. While I was responsible for selecting the research focus, the collaborative participant input enabled their perspectives to be woven together in ways that disturbed systems power and hierarchies of knowledge (Ibid, p. 487). The concept of producing a polyphonic conversation is useful to the methodological framing of the facilitation of this project, which resists

vanguardist forms of knowledge production, elevating and integrating the voices and experiences of young women from disadvantaged social backgrounds, who are often spoken about and for.

With a view to invite the participants into the design process they were made aware ahead of the first session that dominant themes or issues raised by themselves would be explored over the course of the project. Several key experiences were reiterated by all of the participants: Firstly, the impossibility of celebrity and influencer depictions of 'the perfect' body and life; secondly, the experience of carefully staging performances of the self in the mind's eye, as Instagrammable performances of spectacular femininity were identified a route for upward social mobility; thirdly, the overwhelming grip of what I describe as expressive stasis, which refers to their lack of visibility on Instagram as a consequence of their perceived inability to post for fear of *getting it wrong*. In this thesis, I examine the outcomes of an applied theatre workshop exploring these themes with a focus on the power of this work not only to provide new insights but to create opportunities for young women to disconnect from highly gendered forms of technological alienation and mediated individualisation.

Polyphonic Conversations as an Analytical Research Method

Not only situated as a straightforward acknowledgement of the multivocal nature of applied theatre contexts, Mackey also suggests that a polyphonic conversation is representative of a mobile analytical dialogue between theory, practice, reflection and action (2016). In the final section of this chapter, I address how I extend the concept of polyphonic conversations to the analytical framing of this research. Drawing on Mackey's (2016) conceptualisation, I use the metaphor of polyphonic conversations to account for moments of monophony and homophony within my analysis, where, for instance, group discussion or practice is at the forefront, or other times where theory dominates and times when theory and practice are conflated. It also captures times when reflection occurs from a participant standpoint within the practical enactment or when it occurs at a distance through my own interpretative critique of the practical and theoretical processes: a polyphonic conversation (Ibid).

I also adopted this analytical research method to examine the discursive and affective dimensions of the participants' embodied and collaborative re-negotiations of performing the self online. A theatre and performance studies sensitivity to the material in concert with a feminist media and cultural studies understanding of governmental discourse allows the analysis of how facets of the perfect-imperfect-resilience, as theorised in relation to contemporary feminist media cultures, are taken up or challenged in textual and corporeal ways in the workshop environment through the circulation of thoughts, feelings, experiences and affects.

It is a Foucauldian idea of discursive governmentality that informs the work of many scholars concerned with the relations between feminine subjectivities, the media, consumer culture (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009, 2020) and class (Skeggs, 1997, 2001, 2004; Skeggs and Wood, 2013). Accordingly, I have drawn on this scholarship in my analysis in order to theorise how staging performances of the self is carried out relationally to particular subject positions, focusing on how discourse creates classed and gendered systems of value through which subjects constitute themselves as 'knowable' and therefore, worthy of consumption through social media. This involves analysing participants' relationship to particular manifestations of capital that are required to position the self as intelligible within the scope of digital cultures of Instagrammability.

As noted in the previous chapter, foundational to this research is performance studies scholarship concerned with the capacity of the body to produce its own knowledge and agency, not expressed consciously by the intellectual mind (Taylor, 2003; Schneider, 2011; Taylor, 2020). In contrast to Goffman's conception of well-thought-out everyday performances as being bound by societal scripts, these scholars pay closer attention to the flexibility of live enacting bodies. For this reason, Taylor takes a different approach to theorising the theatrics of embodied interaction, using the term 'scenario' to represent a starting point with an outline of a plot that gives the particularities of location, characters, scenes and situations but allows for many possible outcomes (2003, p. 29). Noting the implications of outside regulatory forces, Taylor writes of scenarios, '[i]ts portable framework bears the weight of accumulative repeats. The scenario makes visible, yet again, what is already there: the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes' (2003, p. 28). While actions

and behaviours that arise might be predictable, based on the social construction of bodies in particular contexts, Taylor argues that the scenario continues to be so compelling as a consequence of the body's inherent flexibility and openness to change (Ibid, p. 30).

Applying interdisciplinary thought from sociology; feminist media and cultural studies; gender and digital culture; and theatre and performance studies, I am attentive to the pervasiveness of staging and performance in the lives of young women, while addressing a technological intensification of intellectually constituted modes of self-production, monitoring and surveillance. In my analysis of this subject position in Chapter Four, I focus on group discussion occurring during the workshop project. Making this distinction provides opportunities for the chapters that follow to trace how witnessing or partaking in embodied enactments returns participants to the flexibility of live enacting bodies, building on and altering perceptions expressed in a discursively orientated context.

The analysis of the performance outcomes in Chapters Five and Six also draws on a combination of theories from the array of scholarly fields noted above to interpret the performance outcomes. Through a process of writing performance within the frame of a polyphonic conversation, its possibilities are re-considered and re-marked. Specifically, performance vignettes are selected to bring people into contact with the participant's experiences of a process I describe as 're-worlding' Instagram. This is a mode creative exploration that enables participants to re-encounter the world made by Instagram from an embodied and collaborative standpoint. The selection and interpretive process involved an explanation of how I adapted exercises in relation to ideas, thoughts and themes raised by the participants and an examination of the way embodied enactment was performed and experienced. This required examining discursive structures and judgement systems used to perform the self, as well as paying attention to affective jolts to engage (Thompson, 2009), to be present, stand with and witness (Taylor, 2020), and attention to what was corporeally dragged into the present through modes of re-enactment (Schneider, 2011).

While some notes were taken during sessions, I tried to limit this as I felt it interrupted my live engagement during sessions and had the potential to make participants feel uncomfortable. Instead, following the immediate closure of the sessions, I tended to

compile field notes with attention paid to writing up the instances of performance. Additionally, workshop sessions were recorded with both a video and audio recorder. I spent a large portion of the succeeding day transcribing the workshops. To do so I primarily referred to the video recordings, however the additional audio material helped to recover any inaudible speech. As I transcribed, I was able to re-consider the discussion points and re-experience the performances. This sparked inspiration for adaptions of exercises that would be explored in the coming weeks and heightened my awareness of the young women, and 'the lands they travel through' (Hatton, 2003, p. 140). Additionally, re-listening and re-experiencing allowed me to re-place myself in the workshop environment, enabling me to determine meaningful moments in group discussion and performance. Six of the ten young women who took part in the workshop project also carried out one-on-one post-project interviews which came to provide a rich data source, as the interviews allowed the participants to share their own reflections. Given their emphasis on the individualised landscape of navigating Instagram, I was particularly attentive to discursive and affective sentiments of connection and collaboration within the interview data.

Conclusion

The challenge in conducting this research has been to employ a method which effectively highlights the fertile conjuncture between scholarship from theatre and performance; gender and digital media; and feminist media and cultural studies. The operationalisation of polyphonic conversations in conducting and examining this research refuses clear cut distinctions between the discursive and the affective, theory and practice, action and reflection. The way in which I attend to these facets, in combination with constructing an interdisciplinary framework, allows this project to garner an in-depth social and cultural critique of young women staging performances of the self on Instagram. The focus on applied theatre as a mode of intervention aims to capture the potential of sharing space, ideas and affects in neoliberal times of gendered individualism and technological saturation. The following chapter begins to foreground the utility of applied theatre interventions by examining the findings of this research. It explores how the mental labour of engaging with staging performances of the self intensifies individualised processes of self-surveillance, alienating young women from the materiality of their bodies.

Chapter Four:

Staging Instagrammable Performances of the Digitally Flattened Self: Young Women Navigating the Disembodied Nature of Visibility Labour

> I went to this little flower wall, and I was like that is going to be the perfect Instagram post but then I had to take about 70 different pictures because I didn't like any of them. When you're posing, you have to suck in, you have to put your chin in, so you don't have chins, like move to the perfect angle, it's just like everything goes into it. An it just has to be that way because if I don't like it, it's not getting posted. I'm very much that person if I look like the tiniest bit fat, or the tiniest bit like bog eye or something I'm like, no, it's not going to happen.
>
> <div align="right">Hannah</div>

> You just want your page to look amazing don't you, at the end of the day? It actually is self-absorbed. You end up obsessed with what you're posting, obsessed with, not yourself, but your image.
>
> <div align="right">Abigail</div>

Staging Instagrammability

I begin with these instances, which refer to the desire to stage 'the perfect Instagram post' that will make your page 'look amazing', to highlight that successfully performing femininity on Instagram is a complex and demanding task. In this chapter, I focus on how Instagram transforms performing the self from a situational bodily encounter to an art of successfully producing a flattened digital image, fixed by the smartphone. In particular, I examine how Instagrammability operates to invite young women to undertake a deeply conceptual mode of staging a self worthy of being posted on Instagram. Similarly to femininity, Instagrammability is infinitely shifting, with different meanings depending on the socio-cultural context. However, the broader cultural understanding of Instagrammability as a highly curated and perfected mode of digital self-branding is important here. Despite recent gender and digital media research attentive to how this aesthetic has intensified professional content creators' preoccupation with artfully curating authenticity (Duffy and Hund, 2019) – or 'the imperfect' (McRobbie, 2020) – this chapter demonstrates the young women's commitment to a version of 'the perfect' (McRobbie, 2020), upholding the well-known cultural meaning and significance of Instagrammability.

Similarly to McRobbie's theorisation of 'the perfect', for the participants, 'being Instagrammable' designates a beautified appearance, glamourous attire and an aspirational lifestyle. These ideals implicate Hannah's self-assessment at the beginning of this chapter, as there is an intensity applied in which the individualised subject must rigorously monitor, stage and succeed in the performance of socially valued notions of feminine beauty. The callous way that Hannah enumerates her self-determined flaws and their unworthiness to appear on Instagram is indicative of an acceptance of the 'normative cruelties' (Winch, 2013) inherent in 'the perfect's' (McRobbie, 2020) intensification of violent postfeminist regimes of self-monitoring. Despite a re-emergence of strands of feminism in the popular domain, encouraging young women to embrace their imperfections and be more resilient so they can reach their full potential (Banet-Weiser, 2018; McRobbie, 2020), self-monitoring and surveillance remain central concerns in digital cultures of Instagram. The vehement pursuit of success in the staging the perfect appearance and lifestyle on Instagram demonstrates the continued importance placed on postfeminist modes of self-government, encouraged within the borders of highly individualistic understandings of subjectivity (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009; Gill and Scharff, 2013).

Yet, in exploring recent discourses of self-government in the lives of young women, it would be overly simplistic to say that these accounts reproduce a straightforward application of postfeminist norms. Following recent feminist cultural and media studies scholarship (Banet-Weiser, Gill and Rottenberg, 2020; McRobbie, 2020), I contend that in addition to re-instating de-politicised postfeminist cultures of self-production, a desire to stage 'perfect' performances of the self can be traced to the contemporary cultural conjuncture, where there is a popular feminist emphasis on exerting control over aspects of one's life. In this context, discourses of women's empowerment have come to underpin the portrayal of the #girlboss – whose Instagram page *looks amazing* – due to overt success in the realms of fashion, beauty, career, productivity, lifestyle and sexuality. In this chapter, I begin by locating the young women's perception of this aesthetic in connection to McRobbie's theorisation of the perfect-imperfect-resilience (p-i-r) (2020). I contend that there are significant socio-cultural differences in the way that the 'p-i-r' is experienced and perceived in relation to cultures of Instagrammability.

In particular, I examine how as white, working class young women they are addressed as both subjects of potential and as outside of the direct remit of particular subjective formations of the p-i-r. In exploring differential access in staging idealised portrayals of contemporary femininity, I identify the raced, classed and gendered dimensions of a phenomenon I describe as expressive stasis, which refers to how young women remain active in their pursuit of some level of proximity to the perfect, while repetitively being gripped by bouts of digital inactivity, for fear of not appearing Instagrammable *enough*. While Abidin (2016) is sensitive to the tacit and affective dimensions of 'visibility labour' that *pays off* – in that it produces posts that perform the subject's apparently effortless accruals of status and value – I am concerned with the conceptual aspect of visibility labour, which weighs heavily on the minds' of those socially disadvantaged users who are unable to achieve an Instagrammable post and, as Abigial notes, '…end up obsessed…' with staging an idea of their self image.

Through employing a polyphonic conversation as an analytical framework, I draw from a range of scholarship from feminist media and cultural studies; gender and digital media studies; theatre and performance and sociology in order to examine the prevalence of staging and performance in the accounts voiced by the young women. However, I am particularly attentive to how these staging and performance processes are disembodied, flattened and de-dramatised through a deeply mental state that works to alienate the young woman from the materiality of her body. Even in practices that centre the body's physical presence, such as posing in front of a friend who is dutifully capturing pictures on their iPhone, I suggest that an awareness of the material body is absent due to a conceptual investment in enacting a product of the mind. Though hearts might race in anticipation of securing 'the perfect' post, I am sensitive to processes of dematerialisation that occur when the young woman gazes down at a captured image and is flooded by thought processes of surveillance, comparison and measurement. In this chapter, I focus on accounts voiced by the young women during group discussions, this provides the necessary groundwork for the following chapters in this thesis that explore the potential of returning to the body through performance practices prioritising embodiment. In what follows, I begin with the young women's engagement with Instagram, specifically in relation to their behaviours of consumption.

Studying the Script: Instagram and the Fear of Missing Out

During the first session, amongst the clamour of each young woman finding a chair and lifting, dragging or shuffling it into place to form a circle, I heard Hannah say with a sense of exhaustion: 'Instagram, I hate it'. Remarks like this were commonly voiced amongst the young women over the course of the workshop project. At the same time, the participants situated Instagram as a dominant feature in their lives, benefiting them positively in a number of ways through providing entertainment, social connectivity and feelings of control, agency and pleasure. Following the tradition of many other feminist cultural and media theorists, I was interested in exploring this complicated relation of disdain and joy experienced by young women who engage with facets of feminised popular culture. In this study, it became apparent that underscoring the range of potential benefits and disadvantages of engaging with Instagram was the fear of missing out, colloquially referred to as FOMO. This desire to keep up with cultural scripts took on several formations, from the fear of missing out on cultural happenings, to new trends, to social events and potential romantic pursuits:

> Hannah: My Instagram search is my life. Like I can sit there for hours, cause when you search something it sort of like goes off what you have searched. So, my Instagram search [page] is a way to keep up to date with everything I like. I don't know I feel like it's a form of entertainment isn't it.

> Jessica: But a lot of people do it for like, say if you're single, I know a few people who post for male attention. I'm not bothered but I remember there was this guy erm that popped up to me, he was flirting me with because I had only just posted.

> Sarah: Ooooo.

> *The young women burst into a fit of laughter. Jessica begins to look embarrassed.*

> Jessica: No, right, last post I did was December last year for Alice's party, but I remember he popped up and he was flirting with me and because I said I didn't fancy him he was like "You're ugly, you're this, you're that". And I think a lot of girls feel they need to post to attract a partner.

> Hannah: I do agree with you there, like when me and my boyfriend broke up for a bit I said to a lad in our class, I was like I need to get my Instagram game up because I don't have a boyfriend no more' and we went through [my Instagram page] and he literally was like "Right delete all these and I'll tell you what to post" and we spent half an hour changing my whole Instagram up purely because I'd broke up with my boyfriend. I think it shows when

you want attention. You don't want it if you're getting the attention that you need, if you know what I mean, like sometimes I need it more than other times.

Sarah: In year 11, I was just so stressed with everything, I was like it's this, it's this, it's [Instagram]. Because you always see celebrities and they're like "Oh my God, get rid of your social media, it will feel amazing!" So, I was like I'm going to do that. I did and then, I swear to God the same day I was like I can't, like everyone is going to be messaging me… they didn't!

Sarah erupts into laughter. Hannah is nodding her head and laughing.

Hannah: Yeah, yeah.

Sarah: I was like I'm missing out on everything!

Hannah: No, I hate… that is the biggest thing I hate. I hate feeling like I'm missing out.

Jessica: I do.

Rachel: I do, it's so bad.[18]

The young women's practices of engagement with Instagram are situated as an essential measure through which to fend off the fear of missing out and to study cultural scripts in order to accrue knowledge that might speak to their interests and potentially increase their value in terms of portraying themselves. This is reminiscent of the feminist cultural analysis of girls' bedroom culture offered by Angela McRobbie in the late 1970s, in which *Jackie* magazine UK was located as a key site where, on a weekly basis, girls would nurture their understandings of how to approach romance, friendships, fashion and beauty (1991). A highly conservative, hetero-patriarchal agenda constrained the content of these magazines, urging girls to present themselves in ways that would be pleasing to the opposite sex (Ibid). Hannah notes that digital media affords spaces for young women to cultivate and curate the content they encounter, as the algorithm on their search page is sensitive to the accounts they choose to follow and the types of content they engage with. In the young women's accounts, this sense of control is transferred to the space of relationships and romance as they discuss that posting can be a way to rouse attention and desire. However, this transformation in power relations is complicated by Jessica's account of misogynistic espousals of abhorrence when attraction is not reciprocated and by Hannah's dependence on masculine desire to ensure that her Instagram page is optimally attractive when she is

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[18] Longer transcripts of the discussions included in this thesis can be made available on request.

newly single. Despite the increasing popularity of strands of feminism in the media, here, we see how traditional hetero-patriarchal codes of fashion, beauty and romance reassert their dominance and regulation through the young women's engagement with Instagram.

While the following section focuses on young women's posting behaviours, here, I take a closer look at their assertions of agency in relation to choosing who they follow. It became evident that it was a combination of the fear of missing out and, as Skeggs puts it, 'the fear of getting behind or not having the right knowledge' (1997, p. 104) that contributed directly to the young women making similar choices when it came to their behaviours of consumption:

> Sarah: I'm not the biggest fan of like the Kardashians-Jenner's or whatever but I literally follow every single one of them because I feel like that's all everyone talks about. They'll be like "Ahh did you see what Kylie Jenner wore?"
>
> Rachel: Yeah
>
> Hannah: …because you want to get involved in the conversation.
>
> Abigail: I'm not going to lie but I am obsessed with the Kardashian[-Jenner's].[19] Their lives – everything is so glam all the time.
>
> Laura: Yeah, I like seeing what they wear and how they do their make-up.
>
> Hannah: Same.
>
> Jessica: Yeah same.
>
> Abigail: They are massive trend setters.
>
> Melissa: Yeah, and I like to keep up to date with the new fashion and makeup trends and think about how I might do them myself.
>
> *Rachel, Abigail, Laura, Hannah, Katy and Jessica nod in agreement with this*.

There was an expressed desire to follow figures of spectacular femininity such as the Kardashian-Jenner's, whose appearance is characterised by long and flowing hair extensions, heavy and immaculate make-up, manicured nails and false eyelashes. The young

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[19] The uber successful reality TV show 'Keeping up with the Kardashian's' is often referred to as 'the Kardashians' for short. As a result sisters Kim, Kourtney, Khloe Kardashian, and Kendall and Kylie Jenner are often grouped together as 'the Kardashians' despite differing surnames.

women acknowledge following these accounts as a way to acquire social knowledge and keep up with new trends of digital femininities, as well as echoing the well documented pleasure young women experience in consuming images that depict the beauty, glamour and wealth of celebrity (Stamp, 2000). They also noted how subscribing to this digital realm of the spectacularly feminine included following the accounts of local Footballer's girlfriends, UK Love Island contestants, fashion and beauty influencers and specific music artists and actors.

As white, working class young women geographically located in Liverpool, they are particularly susceptible to this *choice* to follow streams of hyper-femininity. This is precisely because of the connection between local cultures of using excessive beauty and glamour to accrue value and the greater Western Anglophone media context where white young women continue to be situated as the most important subjects of femininity. For instance, the Liverpool specific normalisation of unashamedly wearing one's hair in rollers in public– to achieve long lasting, bouncy curls – directly addresses white women with untextured hair, actively excluding Black and Indigenous women of colour (BIPOC) on the basis of their textured hair. Notably, this symbol of Liverpool beauty culture became legitimised by the white, working class wives and girlfriends of premiere league footballers such as Coleen Rooney (Figure 1). The widespread documentation of public displays of such behaviour came to symbolise a wide range of heightened beauty and grooming practices as creative means to blocked chances of economic capital. While BIPOC women are pushed out of the picture, white working class women receive more encouragement to view themselves as subjects of potential who might be able to perform the self in ways that accrue value and status. On a broader scale, the wider 'economy of visibility' (Banet-Weiser, 2018) in the media landscape continues to reinforce the importance of whiteness to femininity with, for instance, the casting and production of the reality TV show *Love Island* and the disproportionate brand endorsement of white fashion and beauty influencers, actors and artists.

Figure 1. Coleen Rooney. Daily Mail

However, complicating the young women's location in the direct field of this address can be linked to Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner's complicated *interference* with the whitewashing of feminine beauty. It is noted, for instance, that Kim Kardashian 'strategically embodies both the trope of the heavily regulated white body and the trope of the curvaceous, exoticised, non-white (implicitly Black) body' (Sastre, 2014). This can be recognised in the posts she shares on Instagram which frequently update her followers with the details of her intense fitness regimes and advertisements for diet lollipops, teas and shakes, while using fake tan to darken her skin and cosmetic procedures to exaggerate her curves. This serves to reify the normativity of regulated whiteness and the exoticism of Blackness. Employing emphatic declarations of her mixed Armenian heritage in relation to her sexualised, bronzed and curvaceous body, Kardashian has repetitively attempted to excuse many forms of implicitly Black cultural appropriation. Despite the absence of a mixed heritage, the youngest of the Kardashian-Jenner family, Kylie Jenner, has contributed significantly to this scene through various approaches to distilling racial ambiguity. Specifically, she is critiqued for portraying a caricature of stereotypes associated with Black women's bodies through a cosmetic surgery transformation to plump her lips, breasts, thighs and bottom drastically. Jenner's congenital whiteness, in tandem with her racialisation of forms of excessive femininity harmfully normalises the re-enactment of stereotypes of Black beauty while reasserting the idea that youthful white women are the central tastemakers for femininity. This works to exclude the multiple lived experiences of Black women, forming a raced and classed body standard, accessible only to those who can emulate racial ambiguity through expensive grooming practices and cosmetic procedures.

In the young women's accounts, I observed a sense of understanding of their inaccessibility to these spectacular modes of self-modification:

> Abigail: You see Kylie Jenner and you will be looking…
>
> Laura: And you do get jealous, you do get jealous!
>
> Abigail: Yeah, you do! Let me show you.

Abigail reaches for her phone, scrolling to find one of Jenner's posts to reinforce the legitimacy of her jealousy. She lands on an image depicting Jenner sitting on the edge of a

sun lounger in a thong bikini against the backdrop of blue skies and a luxurious outdoor swimming pool; the caption reads 'getaway' (Figure 2). The image captures Jenner from behind, though her long, flowing hair is scooped to one side, allowing her to tilt her face towards the camera, as the sun bounces off the angles of her contoured face. Jenner is leaning forward and arching her back, accentuating her already exaggerated curves. Another post Abigail brings to my attention shows Jenner glamorously adorned with immaculately applied make-up, styled hair and sparkly jewellery, she is posing in a bright pink cut out spandex outfit while gripping one of her breasts with her hand, embellished with extremely long acrylic nails (Figure 3). Eyes wide and mouth gaping in disbelief, Abigail holds the second post up for the group to see and says,

> You look and you go 'How does she look like that?' Come on, it's not fair now, how is she actually looking like that?

The young women's shared sentiments of jealousy and injustice evoke the cruel subjectivity experienced by young women from disadvantaged economic backgrounds who compare themselves to the curated lives of those who have unlimited access to cosmetic procedures, as well as luxurious lifestyles, beauticians, hairstylists, designer clothes, personal trainers and nutritionists.

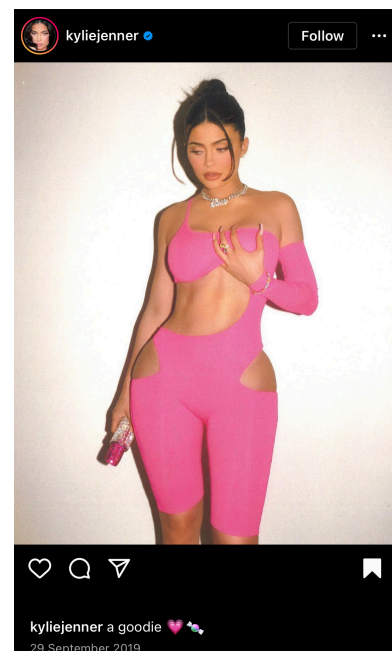Figure 2. Kylie Jenner. Instagram.

Figure 3. Kylie Jenner. Instagram.

Abigail asks, 'How does she look like that?', and in doing so, she signals her knowledge of the wide range of self-modifying and perfecting practices required to stage these performances of the self. Underscoring this is the widespread knowledge of Jenner's aforementioned bodily transformation, which began at age 17 – the same age as most of the participants. Jenner's hyper-sexed and glamourous Instagram aesthetic homes in on these modifications with a central focus on the body. Most often, the body is encountered in its entirety in bikinis or tight, cut-out clothing against luxurious backgrounds. Other times, a particular body part will fill the frame, whether it be a face, lips, bottom, breasts, or stomach. Statements made by Jenner about these cosmetic procedures reassert feminist sentiments of empowerment and choice experienced as a result of exerting control over her look and the ability to experiment or upgrade it (Lewis, 2017). Discussing her feminism, evolving look and growing following back in 2016, Jenner said in Teen Vogue magazine:

> Yes I do consider myself a feminist, I'm a young woman, for one thing, and I don't depend on a man or anybody else. I make my own money and start my own businesses, and I feel like I'm an inspiration for a lot of young girls who want to stand on their own. […] And I do feel like I inspire them – because I'm always changing up my look and experimenting. […] I see a lot of girls following my trends and, because they're experimenting, [they're] becoming more comfortable in their own skin' (Nast, 2016).

Following a trend of vapid feminist espousals voiced by celebrities at this time (Gill, 2016), Jenner's feminist identification is considerably lacking in politics. Instead, she makes claims to her #girlboss status by reinforcing the importance of proving one's control over the regulatory postfeminist luminous spaces of fashion and beauty, ambition and productivity, and sexuality. As noted previously, in a popular feminist landscape, heightened attention to these luminous spaces enrols women in ever-more intense regimes of 'the perfect' (McRobbie, 2020). However, a feminist voice underscores performances of the perfect, staged against the backdrop of 'the good life'. Furthermore, success in postfeminist luminosities is reframed as evidence of overcoming gendered adversity. However, Jenner fails to acknowledge her proximity to these symbols of feminine power, made accessible through her extremely privileged social standing born of the fame and wealth of the older members of the Kardashian-Jenner clan. Furthermore, it is clear from the young women's

accounts that the broad disparity between Jenner's depictions of the perfect body and life on Instagram fails to inspire them to feel more comfortable in their own skin.

The Kardashian-Jenner Instagram aesthetic that centres a new female body standard – plump lips, big breasts, small waist, big bottom and thighs – has been taken up and emulated by the fashion and beauty influencer community. Any sense of comfort experienced as a consequence of engaging with this aesthetic is challenged by Lydia, who is notably disturbed by her exposure to this content:

> Lydia: But then I have to look at alllllll these girls, so I am an insecure person. Everyone knows it. An Instagram doesn't help at all. You see these girls, like these pretty pretty model girls and you think how like? And their skin is literally perfect. And you know it's not realistic at all because their bodies are all the same - tiny waists, big bums, big lips, big eyes – it causes anxiety.

> [All the other young women nod or voice their agreement with 'yeah's' and 'definitely's']

Lydia begins by saying, 'I *have* to look at alllllll of these girls…' inferring the relations of force that contribute to how young women become embroiled in a cultural disposition that positions them both as subjects of potential and outside of its direct remit, inciting exploitation and suffering. In *choosing* who to follow, the threat of becoming more of an outsider through lack of cultural knowledge is levelled against the threat of seeing something traumatic. Both 'initiate a set of risks and punishments' (Butler, 1988, p. 528) that loom over young women in a technologically saturated landscape with 24-hour access to participatory digital cultures. Extending a theatre and performance studies approach to traditions of feminist cultural and media studies scholarship, I am attentive to the theatricality of this situation in which Instagram has become a kind of stage allowing wireless proximity to a multitudinous array of performances of spectacular femininity. Just as theatre practitioner Augusto Boal addresses power relations organising bodies in the theatre (2008, p. 470), I recognise how power relations shape the types of bodies and scenarios that move across the screens of the young women and how these performances articulate power.

Young women can be up late in their bedrooms in Liverpool, scrolling instead of sleeping, while encountering through open digital windows, a model in a bikini and a fur coat in

Aspen and then moments later, another, almost identical to the last, again bikini-clad, basking in the Ibiza sun. Emphasising this ceaselessness, I ask: does the day end if you are consuming social media content produced all over the world from multiple temporal angles? As Lydia expresses her distress at bearing witness to these relentless homogeneous displays of the feminine ideal, the young women present showed their vehement agreement, with both physical and verbal signs of solidarity. This calls into question their earlier espousals of pleasure and enjoyment, and rather, indicates the subsequent mental and emotional impact of the constant flickering of a feminised 'world of ideas' as performance scholar Drew Leder (1990) might put it. With this, we are reminded of the violence of 'the perfect' operating at the everyday level of social media and inserting itself within the privatised spaces of young women's lives (McRobbie, 2020, p. 42). This thesis, however, specifically recasts the perfect in the context of successfully performing youthful femininities on Instagram, in which I suggest an absence of attention to managing the home, motherhood or career progression intensifies the centralising of physical appearance, contributing to thoughtful consideration of, as Abigail might put it, 'How are they actually looking like that?'. In particular, Lydia draws attention to how one can become lost in cognitive processes of the 'How?', through careful consideration of the young women starring in the production that is Instagram. Important to my analysis are the ideas of performance scholars such as Leder (1999) who have investigated the way we become alienated from the materiality of our bodies through our thinking minds. This is particularly useful for understanding the ceaseless temporality of this feminised 'world of ideas' that works to alienate young women from their bodies. The 'how?' provokes an intellectual response, demonstrating an understanding that these displays are, in Lydia's words, 'not realistic', as the plump bottoms and lips signal cosmetic surgery, while the big eyes are a sign of editing or filters. However, real or not, a new ideal of performing Instagrammability is established and in turn, Lydia is brought back to an awareness of her own body through the physical sensations of anxiety.

I locate this feeling of anxiety as linked to how young women are addressed in raced and classed terms – as previously noted – as both subjects of potential and outside of the direct remit of this youthful version of the perfect. Instagram promotes the idea of the self as a project to be worked on, and this has contributed to the normalisation of what has come to

be known as the #glowup. This is a term predominantly used to celebrate a young woman who has drastically evolved her appearance to overcome her perceived physical flaws. As a consequence of the transformation Kyle Jenner underwent in public view, she is positioned as a central figure of glow up culture. This has also contributed to the broader normalisation of cosmetic surgery procedures in recent years. However, interfering with narratives of glow up culture is the young women's exposure to other strands of popular feminism. The following exchange, for instance, demonstrates the difficulty of navigating the contradictory messages they are receiving about their bodies in the contemporary landscape:

> Abigail: I want to have my lips done now because it's all I see on Instagram and all my mates are getting theirs done.
>
> Lydia: Same.
>
> Katy: Same.
>
> Abigail: But you shouldn't.
>
> Lydia and Katy: No.
>
> Abigail: It's sad because you'll regret it though, you'll regret…
>
> Lydia: It's sad that you have to feel like that isn't it, isn't it? Because I really do, I kind of really want mine done but then I think that's why, like if my mum was alive she'd be fucking smacking me like 'what are you doing?' like 'no, you're pretty the way you are!' – [*Lydia shoots an apologetic look at me*] sorry for swearing - just passionate.
>
> Katy: It is sad. It's also like are we supposed to all look the same as each other? Big lips, tiny waist and big bum?
>
> Jessica: It's getting a bit better though with like plus size models in adverts and like plus sized actresses in films, you know like that comedian [Amy Schumer], she was in a film called *I Feel Pretty*. […] there is loads more going on nowadays which is helping with body awareness and making everyone feel beautiful.

On Instagram, young women are bombarded with streams of spectacular femininity; however, elsewhere, mainstream media promulgates a popular feminist message championed by the body positivity movement that seeks to persuade women and girls that all bodies are beautiful, *flaws* and all. Prompted by Lydia's poignant assertion that given the chance her mum would tell her 'You're pretty the way you are', I note how this popular feminist message is congruent with the unconditional love of a mother, however, when

portrayed by Hollywood, corporate brands and advertisers, the message becomes much more sinister. In the film *I Feel Pretty* (2018), noted by Jessica as an example of progress, Renee (played by actress Amy Schumer) is an everyday woman plagued by feelings of insecurity and inadequacy that prevent her from reaching her goals in life. After falling and hitting her head in an exercise class, she wakes up to believe herself to have the beauty of model Emily Ratajkowski. Feeling like the most beautiful woman on the planet, Renee has the confidence to fulfil her potential in the luminous spaces of ambition, employment and sexuality. At the end of the film, when Renee realises her appearance had never altered, she grows to love her imperfections. Drawing from McRobbie's theorisation of the perfect-imperfect-resilience (p-i-r) (2020), I recognise how this plot works to erase the exploitation and suffering young women experience at the bidding of media industries, instead putting the onus on the individual to be resilient, to shake off her low-esteem and embrace her flaws in order to succeed, as Renee does. Therefore, it is particularly interesting to examine this example raised by Jessica in contrast to her classmates articulating the struggle of negotiating competing narratives that they should both pursue the perfect and embrace their *flaws*. In what follows, there is a shift to examine the young women's accounts of staging and sharing content, analysing specifically how the young women perceive and experience the p-i-r and how it intersects with how they navigate the disembodied dimensions of visibility labour.

Expressive Stasis: Staging and Stage Fright

At the time of the workshop project, Instagram offered three modes of sharing content: main page, story and live[20]. To use Instagram parlance, while 'posting stories' and 'going live' came up over the course of the workshop project, the young women focused more specifically on the attention paid to their *main* pages on what they described as their *main* accounts. The young women situated their main accounts in direct opposition to what they described as friends or spam accounts, used as a dumping ground for amusing singing or dancing videos. While spam accounts allow for spontaneity and silliness, the approach to

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[20] In the Summer of 2020, Instagram introduced its reels feature, a reproduction of TikTok's main features, as it offers a suite of creative tools to splice together 15 second videos alongside music, filters and text.

their main accounts was much more calculated, requiring staging to cultivate a distinctive feeling to be experienced by its spectators:

> Melissa: I think the main one is what you want to be perceived as. So I'll like look at people's accounts that I think are nice then I'll be like maybe I should go with that vibe for like my Instagram an then you like take pictures of things that match that theme. But not everyone has themes.
>
> Sarah: Melissa is quite an aesthetic person, so her thing is going to be aesthetic.
>
> Abigail: I don't know what I am. Am I just a follower? You just want your page to look amazing don't you, at the end of the day? It actually is self-absorbed. You end up obsessed with what you're posting, obsessed with, not yourself, but your image.
>
> Katy: Personally, I like to post things that I think people will like cause they'll be like "Oh she's doing this, she's living life". But I'm not really, I'm just sitting in college.
>
> Abigail: Yeah, I'm like that.

Melissa, Abigail and Katy demonstrated their investment in this mode of expressive production. Long practised within scrapbooking or collage-making, this is an activity made more accessible and less expensive through free, user-friendly digital creative platforms (Kearney, 2015), such as Instagram and associated editing applications. Unlike traditional modes of crafting explored primarily in private, the Instagram main page feature operates as a public mode of scrapbooking your identity. This provides an opportunity for young women to exert control over how they are perceived, staging and selecting pictures to post, employing rhetoric or wit in their captions and experimenting with a range of filters to create atmosphere and tone. The public nature of this scrapbooking process means that staging, producing and sharing content enables young women to share interests and experiences that might increase their status and generate belonging, admiration and desirability. While Melissa takes a more stylistic approach to curating her posts, underscoring Abigail and Katy's assertions, in particular, is a desire to assimilate #girlboss culture. With this there is an acknowledgement of the enjoyment and satisfaction experienced when successfully sharing portrayals of the 'good life'. Notably, however, despite the range of incentives to post and the pressure to be visible on Instagram – grounded in its normalisation as a key structure of contemporary social life – the vast majority of the young women did not consider themselves *big posters*.

Jessica, for instance, went as far as deleting the app entirely for a period of time:

> Jessica: When you say to someone you don't have Instagram they are like "Oh my god, why don't you have Instagram? Why not?" and you're like "Don't know…".
>
> *Jessica shrugged and then turned to me.*
>
> Jessica: Because like I deleted it because I'm very self-conscious, so I was like I'm not going on it, so I deleted it and then a few months later I came back on and I still haven't posted anything.
>
> Hannah: Yeah, I'm like that, I'm always on Instagram but I'm not really a 'posting' person.
>
> Sarah: I'm not.
>
> Rachel: Me either.

This refusal to cast oneself in Instagram's spotlight demonstrates the constitutive limits of the Instagrammable version of the perfect laid out in the first half of this chapter, motioning towards the young women's lack of resources and capacities to successfully stage and perform its symbolic value. Rather than focusing solely on the expressions of low esteem noted by the young women, I argue that their refusal to post underlines the broader social investment in subjectivities of feminine-perfection, exposing the classed and gendered scopic economy in which the young women live. In this technologically saturated landscape, then, the phenomenon of not posting makes obvious the complex, demanding and laborious nature of successfully performing the feminine self online. As such, in not posting, the young women challenge the expectations of the gendered neoliberal subject who ensures she gets the perfect shot. As I will discuss in more detail at a later point in this chapter, it also rejects the classed and therefore risk-laden invitation to measure the social acceptability of one's flaws in order to carefully stage 'the imperfect'. For these young women, then, refusing to post can be thought of as a mode of surviving these complex and contradictory messages. Additionally, when Jessica opens up about her insecurities around posting, there was an invitation to commonality that transcends the disciplinary and individualised 'can do' logic of resilience which McRobbie (2020) describes.

This reluctance to take up space on Instagram can be recognised as publicly refusing to comply with the perfect-imperfect-resilience. However, the young women's behind-the-

scenes accounts seemed to tell another story. In the discussion below, for instance, we see a polyphonic contextualisation of Hannah's account included in the epigraph to this chapter, demonstrating the underlying effect of the intertwinement of the p-i-r, in that it constructs young women as inherently flawed and thus as a project to be worked on:

> Hannah: I think I've got three posts on my Instagram, and it takes a lot for me to post. Mainly, I post when I go out on a night out or something and it takes a lot of consideration and thought into what is going on my Instagram. I don't know why I'm like that I just, I think it's more, you're conscious of like, I am obviously very socially aware of everything and everything people think of me, so a lot of thought goes into it. I remember I went to this little flower wall, and I was like that is going to be the perfect Instagram post but then I had to take about 70 different pictures because I didn't like any of them. When you're posing, you have to suck in, you have to put your chin in so you don't have chins, like move to the perfect angle, it's just like everything goes into it, an it just has to be that way because if I don't like it, it's not getting posted. I'm very much that person if I look like the tiniest bit fat, or the tiniest bit like bog eye or something I'm like, no, it's not going to happen.
>
> Laura: I'm like that.
>
> Faye and Lydia: Same.
>
> […]
>
> Jessica: How many posts has everyone got?
>
> Melissa: I've got 9.
>
> Faye: 5
>
> Lydia: 6
>
> Rachel: I've got 14.
>
> Sarah: 27
>
> Jessica: 21
>
> Katy: 39
>
> Abigail: I have 63 on mine.
>
> Melissa: Because you look gorgeous all the time Abigail.
>
> Laura: Doesn't she? Fuck's sake.
>
> Hannah: It's not that easy for me Abigail.

Abigail: Shut up girls, I don't think I do. It does my head in too, cause you spend literally weeks getting ready for a night out and then it's so hard to like get the right angle and then you're just like what's the point, then it puts you in a bad mood when you're out, like what is the point now of it all?

Lydia: Yeah, yeah and because you start looking at it because obviously when you take pictures, you're like "Ahh my make up there" and you're like "Ugh".

Katy: So, you think about that all night.

Lydia: You think about everything.

Abigail: It's just a proper mental [health] problem.

While the young women understood there to be two camps – those who posted more frequently and those who rarely ever posted – it was clear that all the young women had encountered bouts of what I describe as expressive stasis. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, in coining this phrase I draw influence from Jeff Pooley's description of 'expressive paralysis' (2010, p. 86), used to refer to people who lurk on Facebook but leave their profile fields empty and rarely if ever post a status update. In this thesis, I take a closer look at a similar phenomenon, however, here, stasis is used to describe bouts of inactivity that regularly engulf the young woman, despite her having endured considerable amounts of 'visibility labour' (Abidin, 2016). As noted in the introduction to this chapter, I take influence from Abidin's focus on the tacit and affective dimensions of visibility labour successfully carried out by professional content creators. However, I specifically focus on the workings of expressive stasis in relation the mental visibility labour encountered by socially disadvantaged young women who fail to achieve Instagrammability and are left thinking about it *all night*.

Drawing on Hund and Duffy's (2019) analysis of a new visibility mandate in which middle class professional content creators' toggle between the aspirational and the authentic, I argue that in their case, successfully performing the perfect is taken for granted. As it is an anticipated trajectory, characterised by their proximity to high-status signifiers of glossy Instagrammability. I connect a move away from this towards curating bursts of authenticity interspersed across their largely *perfect* feed to the rise in popular feminism and the backlash against portraying #blessed lifestyles online. In contrast, in my research, the

accounts of performing the self on Instagram voiced by working class young women are characterised by a desire to circulate aspirational and highly stylised posts, with no interest in performing the self in ways that appeared real, ordinary or *off the cuff.* From the perspective of the participants of this study, recognised achievement of success within the realm of performing the perfect is situated as anything but an ordinary occurrence, rather it is situated as a fight against the odds. Therefore, the inevitability of failing at femininity is at the centre of anxieties intensifying the mental weight of visibility labour.

For influencers who stage their content against a backdrop of middle class milieux, they obtain more scope to post in ways that engage with the idea of the feminine-imperfect. For instance, it is acceptable to post a picture of a messy kitchen if the kitchen in question signifies wealth and comfortable middle class living. Whereas, with limited access to these symbols of Instagrammability the young women are under more pressure to seek out middle class signifiers of the perfect, as deterring from this regulatory subject formation means running the risk of being deemed common or rough. When it comes to staging performances of the self, the overwhelming sentiment shared by the young women is that one of the only times you can capture a post-worthy image is when you are beautified, glamorously adorned and, importantly, on a night out. In the discussion above, for instance, Abigail's frustration is palpable as she reflects on the pressure to seize the moment to secure a successful post while on a night out. Here, Laura and Abigail elaborate on the mentally heavy aspects of staging performances of the self that might accrue elevated value and status:

> Laura: You're always thinking about all the elements like what your outfit will look like and your hair and make-up and where you're going to be in the picture like a posh bar or whether there is going to be like nice balloons in the picture, or a flower wall, you know all of this.

> Abigail: The background really makes the picture. It sets the vibe, you don't want people to think you're rough or that you're living a boring life.

The boundaries around where it is acceptable to post indicate the classed dimensions of the young women's experiences of expressive stasis. In staging performances of the self, the young women are propelled out of the family home and its social location in search of an Instagrammable backdrop. While they may not have access to expensive grooming

treatments and designer clothes, they set out to preserve their efforts with a backdrop displaying middle class signifiers of wealth, style and sophistication. A commitment to only posting pictures that reflect a glamourous style of life provides the opportunity to perform the self in a way that differs from the mundanity of home life, college and part-time work. As Skeggs has argued, for working class women, glamour 'is an escape route' (1997, p. 110). Here, we can return to the excitement Hannah felt when she stumbled across a flower wall in a trendy area of Liverpool called the Baltic Market; she felt certain that this backdrop would allow her to capture *the* post for her main account. However, this excitement quickly turned to disappointment when Hannah felt her performance, while meeting classed expectations, did not meet the gendered ideal. I argue, then, that in the contemporary neoliberal landscape, where Instagram has determined glamour as a banal digital aesthetic, the relentless individualism of successfully staging performances of the self confines young women to a deeply thoughtful state, where the intense surveillance of women's bodies and lifestyles is normal.

The young women's accounts indicate the extent to which the question 'How is that going to look on Instagram?' has become a dominating lens through which they view, plan, stage, measure up and experience everyday life. This contributes to experiences of bodily alienation where a young woman might be on a night out, however, there is a detachment from corporeally experiencing her surroundings due to being mentally racked by a feminised 'world of ideas' (Leder, 1990). There is a heightened sensitivity, as evidenced above, to thoughtfully monitoring the appearance of the body and securing a potential Instagrammable backdrop. This out of body experience is intensified by the weeks of planning that occurs in the mind's eye prior to the night out:

> Abigail: I feel like I'm always thinking about my next Instagram post.
>
> Melissa: I think about an Instagram post from when I'm buying an outfit. I think will this look good on Instagram? I'll look at an outfit an think it's like a really pretty outfit but then be like that wouldn't look good on my body because every post that I see on fashion accounts is a skinny girl, that's just what most fashion pages post. It's pushed so much. So I try to pick an outfit that will be flattering for me and then I imagine what I'll pose like or what might be a good backdrop for a picture.
>
> Jessica: I haven't posted in over a year, but I still think about how it would look on Instagram when I'm buying something new.

Hannah: Yeah, even though it doesn't go to plan, I plan it out in my head.

Laura: Same.

Instagram, then, encourages disembodied thinking, in which the enacting body is flattened into a well thought out image to be circulated. While performance studies scholars have critiqued Goffman (1959) for flattening theatricality to a strategic mental process divorced from a physical experience, I reassert the value of his thinking here. In the accounts above and throughout this section, the young women have elaborated on a mental process in which they carefully think through how they might successfully perform the self – their bodies are central – however, they are alienated from their own materiality by an attachment to an imagined Instragrammable image. Building on Goffman's (Ibid) analogy of the contrasting frontstage and backstage, in which the latter represents a space where a singular performer can step out of character, I wish to argue that in the Instagram age, the backstage space offers little respite. Instead, it has primarily become a rehearsal space in which the performer engages in extensive planning and goes through the motions of performing the perfect in the mind's eye. I envisage a picture where the subject is the star of the show; however, situated in the frontal lobe is a costume designer, artistic director, playwright, producer and the director overseeing the whole production. I paint this imagery to emphasise how postfeminist rhetoric continues to reassure young women of their agency and capability to micro-manage distinct areas of their life (Negra, 2008; McRobbie, 2009). Processes of staging and performance are ever-more prevalent in daily life. However, I argue that the young women's experiences of staging performances of the self are significantly de-dramatised, deflated and lacking imagination and creativity, constrained by a script with a predetermined outcome regurgitating idealised digital femininities.

When a captured moment of performance does not meet their imagined expectations, the subject returns to the rehearsal space to retrace their missteps and think about how they could improve their performance next time. Sometimes an understanding of an image as a failure is immediately determined by the subject as not suitable for Instagram. However, the young women also accounted for another scenario in which the undesirability of a picture is determined by the lack of likes it receives:

Hannah: So basically, what irritates the crap out of me is when you post something, and all your mates are getting however many likes, like thousands, and you're on like twelve or something…and you're like "Oh my god I thought I looked proper sexy on that." But then I only get like 12 likes on my picture and I just take it down because there is no point of it being up if I only get 12 likes.

Sarah: Like if it doesn't get so many likes in a few minutes then…

Jessica: …DELETE.

Faye: Yes

Lydia: Yeah, I'm very much like that.

Hannah elucidates the anxiety and frustration felt within the temporal space between posting a picture and waiting to see whether it has enough likes to remain on her main page. In the young women's accounts, a contemporary obsession with metrics underscores the urge to delete posts. It is an acute awareness of the extent of mental and physical visibility labour required to get it right that foregrounds the pursuit of reassurance in the form of likes that will confirm belonging, knowledge and competency. Here, Hannah evokes a sense of how the known feeling of looking good or even looking 'sexy' can easily be lost, as a lack of likes is equated to a lack of desirability and disproof of value. So the post is deleted, and with this, it is back to the rehearsal room.

As the chapters that follow will discuss in more detail, the young women's accounts underlined the relevance of centralising embodiment in the practical explorations of the workshop project to grapple with the power dynamics at play in which some bodies were more visible than others, some active and others inactive. Relatedly, as previously noted Boal describes the division between actors and the spectators stating, 'Some persons will go to the stage and only they will be able to act; the rest will remain seated, receptive, passive – these will be the spectators, the masses, the people' (1985, p. ix). I am struck by how this metaphor from Boal relates to the contemporary phenomenon of expressive stasis and how the body acts as a primary location dividing the actors from the spectators.

A central theme that emerged during the workshop project was the extent to which Instagram imposes on the organisation of everyday temporality in the lives of the young

women. For Roman author Virgil, time was 'the devourer of things' (in Smith, 2016, p. 2), however, I argue that for young women in pursuit of performing the perfect, Instagram is the devourer of time. Becoming Instagrammable requires headspace, it demands planning, getting it right is time consuming and laborious. Sociologists, cultural theorists, government officials and feminist activists have located the temporality of the female body as especially bound by time (Smith, 2016). Feminist discourses concerned with temporality are embedded in the body, in this respect, time is essential to an analysis of staging performances of Instagrammability.

Instagram in itself is an instrument that indicates time, as it functions as a means of remembering time, as noted, digitalising the photo album or scrapbook. The 'insta' in Instagram is short for instant, another indication of time with an emphasis on temporal urgency and immediacy. I argue that Instagram's temporal urgency to capture and post evidence of being Instagrammable in now-time, contributes to experiences of a gendered and classed expressive stasis, constraining performances of the self to a rehearsal room space, organising past and future temporality in the lives of the participants. Many of the young women who took part in the project voiced a similar sentiment: Instagram was so deeply embedded in their daily lives that they had never really stopped to reflect on it critically. The conversations discussed in this chapter created a temporal pause to begin to reflect critically on the social norms of engaging with Instagram.

Conclusion

By presenting accounts of the young women, I have begun to illuminate differences in how the p-i-r is perceived and experienced in the context of Instagram cultures. These accounts highlight important shifts from its original theoretical conceptualisation, demonstrating the distinct qualities that characterise Instagram participation amongst young women, as well as how gendered, raced and classed systems impact the subjective construction and usership behaviours of young women from lower socio-economic backgrounds. I argue that these accounts provide an understanding of the ways in which these young women experience expressive stasis, as a consequence of normative subject positions shaping the negotiating of performing the self online.

Exploring memory and past experiences allows the past tense to slip effortlessly into the present tense, enabling participants to take the past in multiple directions (Schneider, 2011). Having examined how the young women understand themselves as Instagram users, the next chapter explores how embodied exploration of these behaviours might sensitise participants to the production of new knowledges. I explore how the participants used the workshop project to re-world their experiences and return to the body, using unscripted, embodied theatrical practices to explore how performance's temporality is able to further contest the limiting temporalities insisted upon by the gendered, classed and raced systems of Instagram. I examine what is brought into the present when re-enacting past experiences through methods that make the performer's physical presence explicit.

Chapter Five:

Re-worlding the Experience of Instagram from an Embodied and Collaborative Standpoint

> As each young woman rolled over from their faux slumber, they immediately reached out for their devices. Some located theirs in what seemed to be familiar spots, while others scrambled to find their phone temporarily lost in their bedding. Once in their grip, each of them lay or sat, scrolling or tapping away on their phones for some time. The participants then proceeded to act out scrolling on their phones while on the toilet, brushing their teeth, doing their make-up and eating their breakfast.

> - Morning Routine Exercise

The point I wish to outline by beginning with this account is that embodied performance practices hold great potential to explore the world made by Instagram in ways that call participants to reflect on the extent to which they are not present in their bodies in daily life. This morning routine exercise is particularly effective in the initial stages of any theatrical project, as it draws attention to everyday processes of bodily alienation, prompting participants to reunite their thinking mind with their practising body. It involves each participant finding a space in the room in which they enact their morning routine from the moment they wake up to the moment they leave their homes, bringing attention to the phenomenological experience of the body. This is an exercise I have facilitated countless times over the last ten years. As a consequence of digital advancement, I have watched as it has come to provide space for critical reflection, specifically concerning technological alienation, with the smart phone reigning dominant within participants' morning routines. Additionally, it illuminates how the smart phone and its processes, such as social media, demand labour from the subject from the first moment of consciousness, as sleeping is missing out in the contemporary moment of technological saturation.

In the last chapter, I outlined the young women's experiences of what I term as a gendered and classed expressive stasis, tied to their understandings of the perfect-imperfect-resilience (p-i-r) (McRobbie, 2020) and Instagrammability, which, despite the rise of strands of feminism, intensify postfeminist forms of self-monitoring and surveillance. I claimed that despite being gripped by digital inertia, young women continue to actively stage

performances of the self in their mind's eye. I also suggested the extent to which these disembodied performances are de-dramatised, following strict regulatory feminine codes in the hope of staging the body successfully and flattening its image for circulation. There was a shared acceptance of 'normative cruelties' (Winch, 2013) that organised the young women's thoughts and behaviours when engaging with the prospect of sharing performances of the self on Instagram. Thus far, I have been attentive to the mental aspect of this visibility labour, indicating how deeply thoughtful processes of self-production alienate young women from their bodies in current times of neoliberalism.

In this chapter, I outline the potential of embodied and collaborative performance practices to enable participants to explore digital self-production through a process I describe as 're-worlding' Instagram. Re-worlding is a mode of creative exploration that attends to and goes beyond Instagram as a flat surface, re-encountering the world made by Instagram somewhere between the conceptual and the sensory. This mode of exploration is carried out through re-enacting experiences and feelings encountered while engaging with Instagram, allowing participants to use embodiment to rub up against the contours of expressive stasis in ways that re-examine its terms. I claim that through the interventions of the workshop project, the young women experienced an embodied critical reflexivity, allowing participants to re-encounter and produce corporeal knowledges, unsettling regulatory forces such as the feminine perfect-imperfect, constraining how the body signifies.

Arguably, the critical relevance of using embodied performance to re-world Instagram lies in its ability to bring a level of presence to deeply embedded cognitive processes, enabling participants to draw on corporeally held knowledge to re-examine what is known and the terms of digital participation that accompany such knowledge. Secondly, the significance of this enquiry is rooted in the capacity of embodied performance practices to slow the ever-refreshing, fast paced landscape of social media. Platforms such as Instagram may come and go; however, modes of digital self-production show no signs of deceleration. Through an exploration of proximity, presence, collaboration, improvisation, contact and exchange, performance offers new opportunities to re-examine what is at stake in digital cultures of visibility and exposure. Further, this interdisciplinary methodological approach enables the

production of new knowledge informing the fields of applied theatre; gender and digital media; and feminist media and cultural studies.

Multiple theories, practices, voices, ideas, actions and reflections contributed to my approach to both facilitating and analysing the process I describe as re-worlding Instagram. This chapter demonstrates, specifically, how I adapted exercises from Theatre of the Oppressed and Performance Art to centre key themes and sensibilities illuminated by the participants over the course of the workshop project. While each session began with a plan[21], one heavily influenced by the declarations or enactments made by the participants, this chapter aims to demonstrate how I remained sensitive to spontaneous bursts of engagement outside of these plans. In addition to this commitment to sharing in the production of knowledge, the idea of polyphony (Mackey, 2016) is employed as an analytical research method to examine the conversation between the discursive and affective dimensions of the fieldwork, transcending the dualisms between reflection and action, critical awareness and corporeal knowledge. In what follows, specifically, I analyse the facilitation and outcomes of three key exercises explored during the workshop project.

The Advantages of Being a Young Woman on Instagram

I begin this discussion by focusing on an exercise explored by the participants in the early stages of the workshop project. I claim the outcomes of this exercise enabled them to begin to re-world the experience of Instagram, in terms of what it feels like, how it is constituted and how it can be re-encountered, remade and reconsidered from an embodied and collaborative standpoint. Extending influences from the Guerrilla Girls and the creative ways they experiment with complaining, to Augusto Boal's Image Theatre, I set out to facilitate an exercise that might allow the participants to signify and corporeally perceive their passionately voiced dissatisfaction with Instagram. Notoriously, in 1988, the Guerrilla Girls used outrageous statements to place a number of complaints as a result of injustice in the art world. In one session of the workshop project, I shared 'The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist' poster by the Guerrilla Girls with the young women who took turns reading

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[21] For workshop session plans see appendix 1.

the statements.[22] We discussed how the statements use irony and humour to expose women's experiences. I explained that they would use this poster as stimuli to create their own satirical statements about 'The Advantages of Being a Young Woman on Instagram', which would then be embodied and performed through still images. The young women revelled in the prospect of dramatising their Instagram grievances; they could be heard laughing and excitedly discussing potential phrases as they broke off into pairs.

I asked each pair to create three statements: two ironic statements about the advantages of being a young woman on Instagram and one they believed to be genuinely advantageous. Despite the young women regularly declaring their hatred of Instagram – as noted in the previous chapter – this was contradicted by their zealous consumption of the platform. Therefore, following the feminist cultural studies tradition, I wanted this performance exercise to accommodate the complex and confusing experience of engaging with feminised media that brings both pleasure and torment. One embodiment of a positive statement was particularly evocative:

> It involved two of the participants creating a mirror image in which they stood about a foot apart bending at the waist to rest their foreheads together, poignantly encapsulating the statement: 'Discovering like-minded people'.

It was, however, the embodiment of the ironic statements that proved to establish an air of critical distance between the participants and their lived experiences, enabling them to construct a relativistic relationship to their participation with Instagram.[23]

Here, I focus on Hannah and Sarah's exploration of their ironic statements as they provide examples of how enacting and witnessing embodied performance practices can allow participants to re-encounter and reconsider both the discursive and experiential

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[22] To access a copy of 'The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist' poster by the Guerrilla Girls see: Guerrilla Girls (no date) *'The Advantages Of Being A Woman Artist', Guerrilla Girls, 1988, Tate*. Available at: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/guerrilla-girls-the-advantages-of-being-a-woman-artist-p78796 (Accessed: 17 March 2023).

[23] For more on the tension between young women, irony and the media, see: Ang, I. (2007) 'Television Fictions around the World: Melodrama and Irony in Global Perspective', *Critical Studies in Television*. SAGE Publications, 2(2), pp. 18–30.

knowledges of a body encountering the world made by Instagram. After announcing their first statement – 'Thank god I don't have to look good today' – Sarah and Hannah proceeded to get into the accompanying still image:

> They stood facing one another. Sarah stood confidently with her arms crossed and a self-assured smirk on her face. While Hannah cowered with a strained expression on her face, gripping either side of her furrowed brow with her hands.

This still image resonated with onlooking participants Jessica and Rachel, who encountered a reflection of the pressure and subsequent anxiety inherent with the processes of getting ready:

> Jessica: It's as if Hannah is looking in the mirror…
>
> Rachel: Yeah, but instead of seeing herself, Sarah is there looking perfect and judging Hannah for not being pretty or stylish enough.
>
> Jessica: And Hannah is stressed out. I know the feeling, the amount of time I spend picking out an outfit. It takes me at least 30 minutes to pick out an outfit as basic as this one [*Said while tugging at her t-shirt*]. With school you have a uniform, you don't have to worry but with college I struggle. I pick an outfit and I think do I look pretty?

For Rachel, then, Sarah's self-assured stance represents an embodiment of Instagrammable perfection, symbolising a young woman who has succeeded in her efforts to self-monitor and self-perfect. In accordance with this impression, it is as if Sarah is saying, 'Thank god I don't have to *work* to look good today' – because prior self-monitoring and 'visibility labour' (Abidin, 2016) has paid off – unlike the young women in the workshop space who are regularly gripped by expressive stasis as a consequence of their perceived lack of Instagrammability. This enactment, then, brings to life an embodied re-encounter of the act of engaging with flattened images of spectacular femininity in a way that is not straightforwardly dialectical. Specifically, it breathes air into the deflated technological encounter that occurs when scrolling on Instagram or in the rehearsal space of the mind's eye, or as indicated here, figuratively, resurfacing in the mirrors that the young women stare into before leaving the house, reminding them of the golden rule: it is not Instagrammable to wear the same outfit twice.

Fisher (1993) attests to the way watching Image Theatre can allow women to raise questions around the enactment of gendered issues in relation to their own experiences. It also allows participants to tune in to how they feel when watching the embodiment of a particular role. For Rachel, this embodied image brings multidimensional knowledges to the surface. The doubling of these experiences allows for a re-sensation of the ritualised movement and repetitive time spent rummaging through clothing in the hope of finding the right outfit, which will bestow a sense of competency and belonging in gendered and classed terms. In carrying out and witnessing this exercise, the participants enter into a polyphonic conversation where discourses, affects, actions and reflections converge, drawing from and producing knowledge across semiological and phenomenological registers.

In addition to Image Theatre creating opportunities for participants to draw on their feelings, it creates opportunities to actively share in experiences. The shared everyday experience of inferiority noted by the participants above arguably emphasises the dark sarcasm of the original statement: 'Thank god I don't have to look good today'. Unfortunately, the young women rarely experience the heightened relief of those occasions where there is no expectation to aspire towards Instagrammability. The participants affirmed this in the critical dialogue that emerged in response to reflections on this image. The young women commiserated over the Instagram-borne pressure that they should not wear the same thing twice, illuminating how it has extended to govern the behaviours of everyday life:

> Hannah: I do feel like it is hard to like just get up in the morning sometimes for women and go through it all day after day. Like I know myself as a person, like with all the pressure of trying to be a pretty or perfect or whatever your idea of it is. I think it's so much harder for women.

> Jessica: Yeah, definitely and I also think it's just hard cause I feel like we do have to wear stuff twice. My mum isn't made of money so I can't keep buying new stuff. But I feel like a scruff when I keep wearing the same things but like [*Pointing at Hannah and Sarah*] if you or you wore it, I wouldn't be arsed.

> Sarah: I wore this exact outfit yesterday…

> Hannah: No literally…

Sarah: …and I was like everyone is going to think that I'm a scruff that doesn't own a washing machine.

Jessica: …I didn't notice.

Sarah: …and then I was like I just won't take my jumper off because then everyone will see that I wore this t-shirt yesterday.

Hannah: …literally…

Sarah: …it's mad because talking about it now it's like… no one is going to look at what I'm wearing.

I situate this exchange as aligned with the sensibility of being ¡presente! (Taylor, 2020), as the young women's commitment to witnessing enacts a shared sense of solidarity. This is encountered through their physical being together, as well as through their discursively grounded responses to this still image. Taylor argues that the forcefulness of these shared encounters can bring a certain level of corporeal awareness or presence to everyday behaviours that are often carried out unconsciously (Ibid). In technologically saturated times, where images stream across smart phones at a rapid pace, I underline the value of embodied engagement in applied theatre settings to create moments of still, slowing time down to examine what we know, how we know and the limitations coexisting with this knowledge.

Furthermore, analysis of the participant's responses to this dramatic vignette contributes to a body of literature drawing attention to the power of embodied performance to honour the ordinary, providing spaces for young women to position themselves meaningfully within symbolic creative processes, while exploring issues central to their lives that might otherwise be deemed unworthy of critical attention, especially in education (Gallagher, 2001; Hatton, 2003). Making the tacit visible, the exercise sensitised the participants to the ways in which Instagram has come to impact the temporal organisation of their lives. Additionally, hidden tensions were brought to light to reveal shared concerns around being marked as a scruff, a Liverpudlian colloquial used to denote a rough or common appearance. This cultivated empathetic responses, communicating shared understanding and worked to problematise regulatory social knowledge. Through participatory creative enquiry, the young women were able to hone critical and reflective skills to address

gendered and classed power dynamics, allowing the participants to rethink limiting beliefs and behaviours.

I now turn my focus from the experience of witnessing to the effect of embodiment on enacting participants. Specifically, I examine Sarah and Hannah's embodiment of their second ironic statement:

> Embodying "No likes, no worries" both participants crouched down and smiled widely, as if they were having their picture taken. Playfully, Hannah used her hand to make the peace sign, while Sarah pointed directly towards what would be a smart phone.

While the last still image seemed to embody the intensity of thought and consideration that goes into presenting the self, there was a light, carefree quality to the embodied expression of the second image. The irony here is that prior to this, Hannah had discussed the long list of considerations that must be thought through when posing for a potential Instagram post. As previously noted, the young women acknowledged that they must remove a post from the main page if it fails to get enough likes. While the group were in agreement on this issue, Hannah was one of the most stringent when it came to following these regulatory codes, in which she would examine captured pictures to ensure they meet an extensive list of requirements to increase her chances of gaining an adequate number of likes.

In the performance of this still image, then, the carefree and unworried bodily enactments were positioned comedically in contrast to the thoughtful and preoccupied conditions the young women had described surrounding the task of securing an Instagrammable picture. Of specific interest to me was what happened next and how this event seemed to signal a reawakening of an interior corporeal sensitivity to the sensory qualities of this theatrical encounter, altering Hannah's normative external processes of participating with Instagram. After each group had performed their still images and the exercise had concluded, I overheard Hannah excitedly saying to Jessica:

> Hannah: Will you actually take a picture of me and Sarah doing the 'no worries one' because I'm going to put it on my Instagram. It will be funny.

Laughing amongst themselves, Hannah and Sarah re-enacted their still image while Jessica captured it on Hannah's iPhone.

This change in attitude is externally focused on Instagram as a surface; however, notably, this playfully ironic bodily enactment came to re-equate Hannah with corporeal insights producing an agentive spirit - one that did not come to the surface during group discussions surrounding this matter.

As previously noted, Diana Coole (2007) writes of the ways bodies exert agency based on their interiority, however, she is also attentive to how the body's exteriority leaves it open to powerful outside regulatory forces. Consequently, re-worlding Instagram helps to awaken a self-reflexive presence through enacting 'restored behaviours' (Schechner, 2013), allowing participants to experience a sense of critical awareness as a consequence of this restored corporeal sensitivity. This performance exploration, then, provided the opportunity to converge interior knowledge with the external, to question outside forces constraining the body. On the edges of the workshop project, the young women delighted in this space of resistance, using embodied exploration to mock the rules of Instagrammability and the gender regime.

The analytical richness of this moment is substantiated by Thompson's (2009) plea for theatre practitioner-researchers to consider social actions and interactions as equally valuable to planned theatrical work occurring during workshop sessions. In the context of my research, I am interested in small endeavours like those discussed in this section, happening within or on the periphery of the workshop project. Specifically, I assert the power of these moments to allow participants to re-encounter and disrupt normative negotiations of Instagram in ways that attend to and go beyond intellectual understandings rooted in the symbolic, tapping into new corporeal insights. As this chapter will go on to explore in more detail, the performance work involved embodying behaviours encountered either through staging performances of the self or through flattened digital planes. The repetition and doubling inherent in the embodiment of these experiences allowed for moments of re-affect, re-sensation and re-vision – the act of looking back from an embodied standpoint – with fresh eyes (Schneider, 2011). Breaking away from an

investment in flattened images of Instagrammability, instead, the workshop provided opportunities for the young women re-meet their living, breathing bodies – and those of their peers – in ways that allowed them to reach out and touch the digital world they felt alienated from. In this cross-temporal context, paradoxically, re-enacting sameness produced difference and change in perspective. This informs an understanding of how performances of repetitions in daily life allow for consideration of the broader social climate and how something that is negotiated in our cultural and historical worlds gets re-negotiated and changed over time. Doing femininity, then, is encountered as in flux; it is a consciousness of this impermanence that holds potential for future intervention. I now move on to examine how re-worlding Instagram, versus reality, produces embodied engagement that further strengthens a porous relationship with the terms of Instagrammability.

Instagram vs Reality

Building on the tableaux explored through Image Theatre, 'Instagram vs Reality' is an improvisation exercise that foregrounds the re-enactment of a sequence of events. As well as providing opportunities to revisit scenarios that play out repetitively in everyday social reality, it also allows participants to bring to life scenarios that are routinely encountered through digitally flattened planes on Instagram. Before I go on to elucidate the dimensions of this exercise, it is worth explaining the cultural relevance of its title, as 'Instagram vs Reality' has become an idiomatic motif popularised by Instagram users. Embracing popular feminist languages of the perfect-imperfect (McRobbie, 2020), it has come to represent a trend on Instagram in which users upload a post with a carousel of two images to portray the stark disparity between the perfect way life appears on Instagram and the imperfect mundanity of everyday life. In this way, these posts aim to disrupt the contemporary condition of 'hyperreality' (Baudrillard, 1994) exacerbated by Instagrammability, where an emphasis on aesthetic appearance replaces an investment in the real. Users frame these posts in one of two contexts; while some convey a serious tone others are humorous. In this way, it is emblematic of the widespread understanding of both the harm caused and the comedic absurdity of the glossy, artful and carefully staged Instagram aesthetic made famous by the platform.

During one session, Rachel mentioned that she had stumbled across posts of this nature. Influenced by the workshop project she filed them away using the Instagram save feature to share them with the group during the session. Once she had retrieved them, she held them up for the group to see. In describing the posts Rachel said,

> The caption is 'Social media vs reality'. [On the first post] it says, 'Social media' and there is a girl looking really skinny but she is saying "OMG I love this filter". In the reality image there is no filter, she is still really skinny but she's like really straining to suck in. Then in the second one you've got someone who has posted a picture of flowers and then the shop keeper saying to her "Are you going to buy them or not?" Then on the last one there is a group of friends, and it says "Besties" but in reality, they are all on their phones [not speaking to one another].

The three examples shared by Rachel illuminate body image, economic capacity and social life as key sites that draw much attention in terms of monitoring and staging Instagrammability. The previous chapter demonstrated the group's mutual awareness of the extent to which staging Instagrammability across these sites is a strategic mental process. They expressed a known sense of the thought, consideration and deliberation that goes into a new post. In an effort to move away from the centrality of experiencing their bodies through a Goffman-esque (1959) cognitive process that imagines a flattened image of the perfect self, the exercise – Instagram vs Reality – was designed to create opportunities for the young women to physically inhabit the signifying space of Instagrammability that they feel alienated from, through performance work that also draws attention to their physical state of embodiment.

In developing this exercise, I took inspiration from Boal's exploration of social masks. As noted in Chapter 2, this work is concerned with how bodies become alienated by labour, institutions and societal structures. In particular, the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) hosts opportunities for participants to explore how bodies can become half person/half thing in accordance with the social mask that is imposed on the body as a consequence of the labour it carries out (2002, p. 155). For instance, in his exercise, 'Making the Mask All-Encompassing', as noted previously in this thesis, the participant explores the social mask as invading the whole of its being. My re-imagining of Boal's approach to social masks also drew from the Geese Theatre Company's influential work on 'lifting the mask' (Baim,

Brookes and Mountford, 2002, p. iv). The mask is a central metaphor in Geese Theatre's work, magnified by their use of both full faced and half face masks. When a character is asked to lift their mask, they are revealing what is hidden by the *front* portrayed to the outside world (Ibid). This provides an opportunity to explore how people become alienated from their thoughts, feeling and interior corporeal knowledges, due to the pressure to successfully perform external social masks. Instagram vs Reality was designed, then, to provide opportunities for the participants to explore what it feels like, in the first instance, for the untouchable concept of Instagrammability to invade their bodies, and in the second instance, what it feels like to lift the mask.

The exercise began with the group accumulating a list of Instagram worthy scenarios, including instances such as #bestnightever, #datenight, #girlsnightin and #vacationmode. After selecting one of the scenarios, I explained that the first performance would be carried out in the context of Instagram, in which they would imagine that digital aesthetic (or social mask) of Instagrammability had invaded their embodiments with ease and without restriction. I would then say freeze, and at this point, one participant in the audience would tap one of the performers on the shoulder to leave the scene. The dramatised account would then be performed a second time; however, this time, the mask of Instagrammability would be lifted, allowing the young women to enact how the scenario would play out in everyday life.

In developing this exercise, I also took inspiration from Boal's process of Forum Theatre, which usually involves at least two improvisations centred around a social issue, with the second and subsequent performances resulting in a different and more positive outcome. Traditionally, Forum Theatre allows participants to explore TO's capacity to stimulate what Boal describes as the subjunctive mood by which the body moves 'as if' (Howe, 2019, p. 81). Boalian practitioner and scholar Kelly Howe underlines that the central premise of Forum Theatre is subjunctive, providing an outlet to reclaim possibility (Ibid). In Instagram vs Reality, however, I avoided encouraging participants to rush towards possible alternative futures and instead reasserted the value of re-enacting past experiences encountered digitally or in social life in relation to Instagram engagement. This exercise prompted the

participants to explore, as Schneider has described, 'what is dragged along into the present' (2011, p. 5) when past encounters are enacted from different embodied perspectives.

The following excerpt describes Katy and Melissa's embodiment of the Instagram version of the #bestnightever scenario:

Sarah knocks on the door and is welcomed by Katy with open arms and lots of excitement. They embrace and then stride through the party with confidence, taking in the other guests and their overall surroundings. Sarah looks around in awe and exerts "You've got your own bar, that's nice". Shrugging nonchalantly Katy stands at the bar and fixes Sarah a drink, "It's from Aldi, it's violet gin, I love it".

A few of the young women in the audience began to snigger, covering their mouths to muffle their laughter.

Katy hands the gin to Sarah, however, before Sarah can take a sip, Katy takes the drink back and says, "Hold on a minute, let me add some berries". Katy returns to the bar and acts as if she is spooning berries into a gin goblet, before returning the drink back to Sarah who then holds her drink in front of her and mimes snaping a picture. Katy then comes in close to Sarah, darting her eyes across the room she says "Have you seen Ashley? You wanna see what she is wearing"! Katy's expression of pity and revulsion quickly changes to self-assured glee, as she turns to Sarah and says, "She's worn that before and its's a show… but we look good though"! This is quickly reaffirmed by Sarah who says, "Yeah we do, we should get a selfie in our new outfits". With this both girls scramble for their individual phones, Sarah's hand goes towards her pocket, though Katy beats her to it, stretching her arm out in front of their faces as if she is taking a selfie. They smile in the direction of the camera, holding up their goblets of gin and berries, they pose with confidence. 'Got it in one' says Katy.

I yelled freeze and Sarah burst into laughter.

Sarah: Aldi?

This was asked by Sarah in between fits of laughter. The audience of young women burst into laughing too, writhing in their seats.

Sarah: You're not going to get your gin from Aldi, are you? It's not very Instagrammable!

Katy went red in her cheeks.

Katy: Oh yeah, what was I thinking!

Katy began laughing too and covered her face with her hands.

I asked the group to regain their composure and as they began to quiet Abigail and Katy could be heard saying the following:

Abigail: Isn't it mad though that buying Aldi gin is so outrageous though like in the world of Instagram?

Katy: Yeah, it is.

The rest of the group nodded quietly.

Reflecting on the young women's response to this exercise, I am interested in the juxtaposition between their raucous reaction to Katy's misstep and the quiet that followed, allowing for a shared awareness of Abigail's critique and an expression of solidarity founded on mutual recognition of regulation, enacted through their nodding heads. This provides a compelling example of how a critique of classed regulatory codes can emerge as a consequence of failing to successfully perform an enactment of a particular social mask such as Instagrammability. In the exercise, Sarah helped to set the scene of the perfect when she indicated that the house where the party was taking place had a bar, signalling portrayals of wealth and status as seen on the Instagram pages of celebrities and upper middle class influencers. However, for Sarah and those watching, this illusion was ruptured when Katy said that she bought her violet gin from Aldi. The uncontrollable laughter from all of the young women demonstrates the normalisation of a repudiation of working class signifiers. Further, the fits of laughter paired with Katy's red cheeks demonstrates the affective capacity of this misstep to instil embarrassment and shame. However, in the quietness that followed this raucous display, a critical space was opened, causing the young women to examine the absurdity of what was brought into the present moment when Katy took this faulty step.

Next, Melissa tapped Sarah on the shoulder, replacing her in the scene, which was performed again, though this time in the context of reality.

When Katy makes her way across the party to answer the door to her guest, her overall energy is deflated, she is looking at the floor and her shoulders are hunched over slightly. When she greets Melissa there is no sign of excitement; instead her tone is sombre, she forces out a gloomy, "Hi". This prompts Katy to ask if she is alright. With this Melissa's tone shifts from dour to anxious when she says, "No, I look horrible, I need to get so drunk just so I can forget about it". Katy then proceeds to make some drinks. She kneels down on the floor and acts as if she is rummaging around in a cupboard, she says to Melissa, "I think there is some gin in here, it's from Aldi, it's cheap". Melissa takes a sip, spitting the drink back into the cup she says, "No, I don't like that". Melissa looks down at her outfit self-

consciously and with a voice full of distain she says, "My outfit's a show. Look at the state of me". Katy signals over to the other side of room pointing out Ashley, a party guest that they both agree is looking "amazing". Katy asks Melissa, "Shall we try to take a picture?". For the second time Katy stretches out her arm as if she is taking a selfie. The girls smile, this time with much less exuberance. After capturing the picture, Katy and Melissa crowd over the phone. Melissa asserts, "No, I don't like that. I don't like it". Katy starts nervously applying more lipstick, while Melissa smooths down her hair and tugs at her clothing. They attempt to take another picture to no avail. There is a rigid quality apparent in the way they force their faces and bodies into poses. This is particularly noticeable when they go from surveying an image with deflated physicality and frustrated facial expressions to forced smiles and party poses when trying to get a better picture. They continue to repeat this process for some time.

In this re-enactment of the social reality, made in relation to the terms of Instagram, Katy accurately locates the Aldi gin in its classed context, confirmed by her assertion that 'it's cheap'. Arguably, however, as Schneider suggests, the twiceness of this declaration across different embodied perspectives trips the affective condition of witnessing into reflexive hyper drive, 'expanding the experience into the uncanny' (2011, p. 14). This taps into what Freeman describes as 'the queerness of temporal re-enactment' (2000), underlining the political force of re-worlding Instagram as a mode of critical reflection that attends to and goes beyond reading the surface of the body.

With further attention to the cross-temporal dimensions of this exercise, notably, the second performance enacts a difference to the first, in which there was a light energy to their physical expression of swiftly securing an Instagrammable selfie. Whereas as noted in the above description, there was a forced and rigid quality that created a sense of tension amongst the participants. For instance, after I yelled freeze, I asked the young women how it felt to watch or perform this scenario:

> Sarah: I was tensing in my seat.
>
> Lydia: I felt like I was holding my breath.
>
> Melissa: It definitely felt different doing it in this setting, like more aware of how strange it is to be moping around at a party when you could be having a laugh.

This exchange indicates the affective capacity of embodied participatory performance to sensitise participants to the thick temporality of past experiences. Boal makes the argument that performance work that fails to explore the subjunctive mood should be described as

'fatalist theatre' (2002, p. 256). I, however, disagree; instead, I am interested in how the bodily discomfort of performing and witnessing the normalised act that is expressed here, might be transferred into future bodily enactments and potentially make an intervention. If we focus intently on acting out an alternative future, we fail to re-experience the affective capacity of past experiences and habits that re-emerge in our social behaviours. The accounts voiced by the young women indicate a raised consciousness of how regulatory forces constrain bodies. This reasserts the value of sitting with the past to explore how this new phenomenological knowledge might create a different vision of how participants project themselves in the future.

Waiting (to not care)

Accepting the invitation to sit together with their past experiences, the young women actively seized the opportunity to explore, from an embodied standpoint, all the things they consider before posting. This provided an opportunity to explore further the contours of expressive stasis, from a state of stasis, exploring how it feels, the way it is constituted and how it can be re-experienced in a way that introduces a critical element. This was explored through an exercise called 'Waiting' – taking inspiration from Faith Wilding's (1974, 2007) performance of the same name. As noted previously in this thesis, Wilding's original performance in 1974 consisted of her rocking slowly in a chair while listing time spent waiting as a cis woman situated within Western heteronormative structures. It is a chronological telling in which Wilding recites instances of waiting from birth to adolescence to motherhood to old age. Influenced by the connection between this work and the young women's accounts of expressive stasis, I set out to facilitate an exercise that would provide space for the participants to revisit lived experiences and sensations of waiting encountered while engaging with Instagram.

To begin with, I led the participants through an exercise that would allow them to explore the notion of waiting somatically. I asked them to find a space in the room and use it to perform an act of waiting with their bodies alone. This manifested through a range of bodily expressions spanning from activity to inactivity:

At its most vigorous, a sense of waiting was transferred through pacing, looped walking in a circle and full body shaking. Gentler embodiments of anticipation were found in the repetitive foot tapping and slow head rolling from shoulder to shoulder of sitting participants. Other participants maintained complete stillness by lying on the floor or standing in a fixed position.

In contrast to this, in group discussions, examined in detail in Chapter 4, the young women placed an emphasis on the cognitive dimensions of visibility labour, in which they engaged in a deeply thoughtful process of waiting to share digitally flattened performances of the self until they met a long list of requirements. With attention to their narrative accounts, I put forward the metaphor of the rehearsal room to crystalise their descriptions of a mental purgatory in which their minds are racked by a feminised 'world of ideas' (Leder, 1990), impacting their ability to post online. In particular, I have been attentive to how this individualised process can work to de-sensitise and, ultimately, alienate young women from the materiality of their bodies. In exploring waiting from a corporeally oriented perspective, then, I aimed to create opportunities to re-introduce the participants to their bodies in ways that evoke and produce corporeally held knowledge. While the young women were keen to detail the external factors constraining their individual experiences, I argue that the power of using performance to re-world Instagram lies in its ability to sensitise participants to the multidimensional layers of the sensing body and its capacity to transmit knowledge between bodies. Rather than having them look solely from the outside in (as they did in group discussion), by inviting the participants to explore the contours of expressive stasis through embodied exploration, I propose that dualisms between the body and mind, analysis and creativity, thought and action might be transcended. To bridge this divide, I next asked the participants to continue their action while imagining scenarios where they experience a sense of waiting, specifically, in relation to the act of posting a picture. Continuing an exploration of cross-temporality, in framing this direction, I intended to leave the tense of these experiences open to interpretation meaning they might refer to past, present or future instances that induce a sense of waiting.

Bringing this preliminary exploration to a close, I explained that the participants would collectively compose a list poem with the title, *Waiting*. I explained that the poem did not need to follow a chronological or narrative structure. Instead, each line of the poem would describe an instance of waiting encountered when endeavouring to post a picture of

themselves on Instagram. Looking around the group, I saw some nervous glances shared between a few of the young women. Others looked deep in thought, possibly wracking their brains while trying to decide what they might share first or if they would share at all. It became apparent through questions asked that creating this type of performance was new to them, as their studies primarily centre narrative-based performance work. With this, I reiterated the task at hand. I reminded the group that there was no right or wrong and that they should only share if they felt moved to do so. This seemed to dissipate the apprehension I had noticed across some of the faces of the young women. I then explained that after I announced the title of the poem, they would be free to contribute in their own time, unprompted by me. Through my explanation the young women understood that they would need to apply an increased level of focus and attention to each other to avoid speaking over one another. There was a short interval following my initiation of the poem in which the young women stood quite still *waiting* for something to happen. It was not long before the participants began to add a line to the poem one at a time:

Waiting

Waiting for the perfect outfit
Waiting for likes
Waiting for the right time to post
Waiting for a pretty background
Waiting for the perfect angle
Waiting to find a good pose
Waiting for the perfect lighting
Waiting to see how many likes I get
Waiting to see if I have to delete my post if it doesn't get enough likes
Waiting until my make up is perfect
Waiting to be slimmer
Waiting for me to glow up
Waiting to be something
Waiting for my figure to be perfect
Waiting to accept myself
Waiting to fit in
Waiting to be pretty
Waiting for my boyfriend to post a picture of me
Waiting to have a meaning
Waiting to find someone
Waiting to have loads of friends
Waiting for everyone to like me
Waiting to have a voice
Waiting for my hair to look nice
Waiting until I love a picture of myself

Waiting to see if other people love my picture
Waiting to be confident
Waiting to look good
Waiting for validation
Waiting for other people's opinions
Waiting to not care

Unlike Wilding's poem, which follows a classical notion of time as a line that progresses linearly, the young women's cross-temporal scenarios of waiting construct a constellation, or a rhizome as Giles Deleuze (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013) called it, of memories, experiences and feelings suffused by the past, present and future. This rhizome maps the endless surveillance of the body, normalised by intensely individualised regimes of the 'feminine perfect-imperfect' (McRobbie, 2020) and feminine digital cultures of Instagrammability. Drawing from multiple points simultaneously, the extensive list of bodily considerations bleed into one another, as do the shared experiences of the young women. In a similar way to Wilding's original performance, the young women's exploration serves a form of consciousness-raising, illuminating an awareness of the ways they are restricted by the gender regime; this time, however, in a technologically saturated landscape. In the contemporary context, this communal expression of waiting calls into question popular feminist narratives of choice and control that underscore the notion of the perfect in a bid to persuade young women that endless self-surveillance and improvement can be equated with empowerment. It also underlines the inaccessibility of 'the imperfect' for those women without the resources to successfully stage feminine flaws in aesthetically pleasing ways. While this listing exercise illuminates the dominance of the feminised 'world of ideas' (Leder, 1990) that work to alienate the young woman from her material body, I claim that the rejection of a linear narrative structure and the sensory dimensions of this exploration invite small moments of disruption that work to transform conceptions of time, space and subjectivity from fixed entities into dynamic, responsive systems.

The atmosphere was charged in this embodied enactment of the mental space I refer to as the rehearsal room. This was fostered by the participants' attentiveness to reading others' body language and vocal cues to avoid speaking over one another. The mood was pensive, signalling the cognitive dimension of visibility labour, however, this was regularly

interrupted by the young women sharing sighs or gestures of understanding, agreement and commiseration.

> When Jessica said, "Waiting to accept myself", audible sighs came from a number of the young women. Other times when the participants made statements such as, 'waiting to be pretty' or 'waiting for my figure to be perfect', a few of the young women would look directly at the person vocalising this, shooting a compassionate smile or an empathetic frown their way.

The contrast of these spontaneous utterances and gestures against the deliberatively repetitive musing intensified their capacity to enact presence through embodied interference. As Leder (1990) argues, physically present experiences enable sensing bodies to produce and communicate complex, multidimensional knowledges, due to their dynamic and nuanced bodily encounter with the world around them. The forcefulness of a shared sense of ¡presente! (Taylor, 2020) came to a climax when Sarah said 'Waiting to not care…':

> …with this statement there was a transmission of affect, enacted through a wave of movement that travelled across the group. This began with one participant thrusting her arms into the air and clicking heartily, which quickly spread across the group, ending the performance with an eruption of laughter and laudation.

The way in which this performance was spontaneously brought to a halt enacted a collective act of solidarity, with a mutual outpouring of support and agreement from all the participants. This underlines how the method of re-worlding Instagram can illuminate the ways we are not present in our daily lives. The declaration 'Waiting to not care', in connection with the abrupt closure of the performance, signals a sense of impermanence, inviting participants to re-address individualised behavioural norms and the responsibilities and requirements that accompany such norms. With this, waiting is recast as a refusal to work on the self, disrupting the can-do logic of self-perfecting aimed at young women.

Building on this, the participants enacted the poem a second time; however, in the ensuing performance, I asked the young women to incorporate the embodiments of waiting they had experimented with earlier in the session. This time I asked that the movement be repetitive. This meant that for some of the participants, movement remained unchanged. However, the participants who explored fixed embodied responses adapted their bodily

response to waiting by, for example, repeating the action of lying down and standing up. Supported by the thinking that political force lies in the impermanence of misremembering (Schneider, 2011), I reassured the group that repeating the statements in the same order as the original performance was not necessary. I also noted that it would be much more difficult to avoid speaking over one another, but I told them not to worry about this and to share their statements when they felt moved to do so.

With the introduction of these repetitive actions, along with the repetition of the word 'waiting' the circulatory force of the performance gained momentum. The words of the participants overlapped each other, creating a layered soundscape of waiting. With the mismatched tempos of the various actions there was an interweaving of their own embodied senses of duration.

> "Waiting to not care" was declared much earlier in the second performance and took on a life of its own, reverberating from mouth to mouth until it had circulated around the room. The young women layered their full-throated declarations over one another, getting louder and louder until their individual contributions were mostly inaudible.
>
> *Putting my arm up in the air, I brought this fierce and thunderous performance to a close. The space buzzed with the young women's audible reactions to their engagement with this exercise:*
>
> Abigail: Wow
> Sarah: That was very very intense!
> Abigail: It felt therapeutic.
> Melissa: Yeah, it did.

The young women's rhetorical reflection on their personal growth here exemplifies the power of live, embodied and collaborative performance practices to enable young women to critically investigate dominant structures in their life, such as the digital cultures of social media. Despite the initial nerves and uncertainty I sensed in the room, the young women immersed themselves in this exercise, with each contributing to the poem multiple times in the first instance and re-enacting it with great enthusiasm the subsequent time. This shared encounter of presence, of showing up and standing with, underlines the utility of extending applied theatre practices to feminist media and cultural studies scholarship concerned with the intensely individualised landscape of self-surveillance.

As previously noted in this thesis, in her more recent performance art practice, Wilding has revisited *Waiting* (1974). However, instead of urging women to stop waiting, through a performance entitled *Wait With* (2007) she invited a communal act of waiting, employing waiting as a space of safety and even a strategy for resistance. For instance, Wilding writes,

> Every day I meditate on waiting as a productive space between actions, waiting as a space of refuge and becoming, waiting as an active refusal to dominate, to possess, to force production, to consume' (2007).

Similarly, the young women in the workshop project accepted the invitation of communal waiting, bringing their attention to the continuous flow of time while simultaneously bringing them to a halt. Gripped by periods of expressive stasis that weigh heavily on their minds, this exercise allowed for the embodiment of waiting as a space of refuge and becoming, with an acknowledgement of a future time where the young women care less. The various embodiments and declarations of 'waiting to not care' exposed an alternative future open to transformation, contrasting the reality to which they felt confined. Perhaps the occasion to practice and reflect upon the complexities of waiting is one of the most important outcomes of this research. This exercise is reflective of what is at the core of this thesis, to demonstrate the power of applied theatre to create a space where we can bend time so that if we cannot press the pause button on the ever-accelerating streams of digital information, we can slow time down to wait with one another.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown what applied theatre, and specifically, the method of re-worlding, can offer young women during these intensely mediatised times. I situate this analysis as one centring betweenness and besideness in that it is attentive to how embodied re-enactment of experiences, thoughts and feelings allows for a re-negotiation of both presence and thought. In particular, embodied processes of re-worlding enable participants to bring attention to those times in daily life when they are not present in their bodies in ways that allow them to access and tune into disruptive and agentic corporeal knowledge, challenging external terms of participation with Instagram. This has been accessed in some cases through exercises that enable participants to reach out and touch elements of

feminine digital cultures that they feel alienated from. Otherwise, moments of discovery have emerged through exercises in which they have breathed life into experiences that occur within the four walls of the rehearsal room, in their mind's eye. This analysis has been attentive to embodied bursts of presence and connection found across actions, gestures, declarations and attitudes. In doing so, I have demonstrated how re-worlding Instagram offers opportunities to disturb processes of alienation and individualisation, opening spaces of critique and reflection encountered across discursive and affective registers.

This examination implores the reader to think through points of exchange between the discursive and the affective, particularly, between feminist media and cultural studies critiques of contemporary femininity and the political potential of applied theatre in educational settings with young women and girls. I contend that McRobbie's conceptualisation of the perfect-imperfect-resilience (p-i-r) contributes to an understanding of the limits of critical reflection regarding how powerful forces of regulation become embedded in the social fabric of young women's lives. However, my analysis taps into Taylor's recent scholarship examining the importance of being physically and politically present in situations where it seems like nothing can be done. In the chapter that follows, I focus on the power of embodied and collaborative performance processes to intervene with mediated languages of individualism and resilience.

Chapter Six:

From Re-worlding to Re-meeting: The Power of Live and Embodied

Relationality to Intervene with Mediated Languages of Resilient Individuality

Given that the young women were regularly engaged in remote participation with Instagram, a central component of this project involved considering the implications of the young women coming together in the same physical space to explore their shared and differing experiences of navigating online exposure on Instagram. In the previous chapter, I discussed how re-worlding the experience of Instagram through performance can heighten awareness of one's corporeal knowledges at times when young women can become estranged from their bodies through regulatory gendered regimes of signification and technological processes of alienation. I now further examine the outcomes of this process of re-worlding, with a specific focus on the notion of 're-meeting' (Howe, 2019) and the insurgent possibilities of live and embodied relationality to illuminate the violence of contemporary popular feminist languages of resilient individuality.

The term meeting is central here as it partakes in many of the key concerns examined in this chapter, such as the young women's experiences of proximity, collaboration, dialogue, contact and exchange. The 're' preceeding meeting indicates the unique experience of the participants' re-encountering one another outside of their co-ed class, smaller friendship groups or virtually on social media. I argue that the outcomes of this assemblage demonstrate its value for young women struggling to navigate the fraught landscape of performing the self online. In particular, I claim that the inherent qualities of participatory performance afford a playful yet critical approach to intervene with the entrapment of individualised survival tactics, such as expressive stasis.

This chapter begins by examining how embodied performance not only allows young women to express their feelings about the external factors that constrain their behaviours; it allows participants to speak with one another through their bodies. I observe how these conversations, set within the workshop context, draw attention to the body in ways that highlight its entanglement with others across the planes of signification and being. In

addition to analysing how these conversations between speaking bodies produce multi-layered knowledges of relationality, I also examine how a collective attempt at mimesis might allow participants to see with integrated vision. I analyse how this facilitates collaborative ways of looking at being looked at, and seeing through the body, disrupting the individualised lived ordinary. Finally, I examine reflections made by the participants during the post-project interviews regarding the acquisition of new knowledges of relationality, formed across discursive and material registers. This makes the case for the value of participatory performance to disturb violent languages of resilient individuality that undergird young women's experiences of negotiating Instagram.

Speaking Bodies

During the introductory group discussion portion of each session, it was a regular occurrence that one of the young women would launch into a rant about a facet of Instagram, becoming animated in their expression, tone and physical telling of what was on their mind. In these instances, they would often finish by apologising for becoming enraged or being negative or taking up too much time with their own thoughts. In this way, masculinist bureaucratic 'meeting' protocols would assert themselves constraining the participants' comfort with expressing themselves freely. While many of the exercises created opportunities to explore the art of complaining, I wanted to facilitate an exercise that would enable an exploration of these spaces of zeal, rage and injustice in ways that would allow the participants to re-meet one another, bringing the knowledge their bodies bear into these interactions.

Accordingly, I introduced the group to an exercise called 'Rant', which is an improvisation game that encourages participants to express their indignation regarding particularities of everyday life. I was inspired to integrate this exercise after reading about its incorporation in Abigail Leeder and Jade Raybin's (in Blatner and Wiener, 2007) work with women exploring the many dimensions of sexuality in a theatrical context. They advocate for its capacity to generate discussion and debate through personal storytelling, revealing both shared and different perspectives (Ibid, p. 245). In particular, I value this exercise for its ability to enable participants to share candidly and passionately about a particular topic. It begins with three

to four participants standing centre-stage, facing away from the audience. When a theme is called out, one person turns around and begins to rant about whatever the word ignites in them. They continue ranting until another participant turns around, cutting them off and beginning their own rant on the same subject.

Abigail, Laura and Katy volunteered to go first, taking their positions facing the back wall of the studio style classroom. The following describes how they responded to their first chosen topic, 'nasty comments'.

> Immediately after they were given the signal to begin, Abigail span around launching into a rant:
>
>> I just think what goes on in people's heads really to comment nasty things about celebrities. Do you know what I mean? See these celebrities posting stuff about themselves and like people commenting all nasty things like "You're obese", "Look at the state of you", "You've got stretch marks". And I'll just sit there sometimes and look at actually what's being said and think why would you say that. Because if that was about your friend or someone who wasn't famous or in the limelight, you wouldn't be saying that would you? You're actually hating on someone who is actually making a career and making money like what's wrong with you?
>
> At this point, Laura turned around with a perturbed look on her face, and with a raised voice she asserted, 'I don't get why they have to? What's the whole reason for it? It makes no sense at all, that just baffles me! Like why even bother to take out your own time to do a negative comment'. Becoming more frustrated in her tone and temperament, Laura yelled, 'It just makes no sense!'
>
> This caused Katy to swivel around on the spot, facing the audience with a self-assured look on her face she put forward 'I just think it's pure jealousy'. At this point, the young women in the audience raised their arms in the air and began clicking, communicating their emphatic assent. Katy went on, 'You're only, like you only comment hate on someone's picture if you're jealous of what they've got'.
>
> Centre-stage but facing the back of the room Abigail began jumping up and down, finding her own way to expressively demonstrate her agreement with Katy, who continued, '…because I will comment good stuff if I am supporting them. Do you know what I mean? Like if you support someone you will be like "Yasss bitch" but if you don't like it you're going to comment hate because you're jealous'.

Here, Abigail, Laura and Katy express a shared sense of outrage at encountering networked criticism, hate and harassment aimed at famous women who experience high levels of digital visibility. Their frustration was tangible as they collaboratively integrated their

derision and disbelief concerning gendered norms of commenting on Instagram posts. While gender and digital media research has attended to the implications of this for public figures, celebrities and professional content creators navigating an arduous 'visibility mandate' (Hund and Duffy, 2019), this performance vignette illuminates the impact of exposure to networked hate by everyday young women who are constrained by a gendered and classed expressive stasis. While a situated notion of 'the perfect' (McRobbie, 2020) may work to structure the young women's aspirations and push them to desire visibility within the strict bounds of youthful Instagrammable femininities, there is a mutual understanding of its inaccessibility in relation to their current age and social-economic location. This, however, only intensifies the disturbing nature of witnessing celebrities and influencers – who play a huge role in marking out the spectacular boundaries of digital cultures of Instagrammability – receiving heightened levels of abuse, criticism and body-shaming in their Instagram comment sections.

Ranting on stage alongside one another, before an audience of their peers, creates new opportunities to re-world their experiences of Instagram in ways that interweave shared perspectives concerning external forces of monitoring and surveillance. Additionally, Rant works as a powerful vehicle to revisit thoughts and feelings that occur when scrolling through Instagram comment sections from a corporeally oriented perspective. This allows participants to experience moments of connection and exchange that are unavailable in individualised digital cultures of Instagram. Specifically, the young women exploited the exercise's framework to communicate their investment in this topic, from the dramatic way in which they physically span towards the audience to interrupt one another to the spirited delivery of their rants. Echoing Boal's (2008) belief that non-verbal bodily encounters allow the body to communicate its own language, during the performance, the bodily gestures of those refraining from using their voices became more expressive. This can be identified in the clicking of the spectators and Abigail's jumping up and down, enabling the group to speak through their bodies, transferring live and embodied moments of relationality, intimacy and connection.

Another theme fulminated against was 'likes'. This time Hannah, Abigail and Melissa launched into a rant contesting the normalisation of using the picture editing application FaceTune to increase the metric value of selfies. While preparing for this project, I came across an advertisement for FaceTune which began with a young woman staring into the camera with her lips pursed. As she broke into a smile showing her teeth, the rest of the shot darkened, and a spotlight appeared over her mouth. Her teeth, which had a very slight yellow tone, suddenly became extremely white, demonstrating how the photo-editing software can be used to modify the body. The spotlight then shifted to her nose, which became dramatically slimmer. Next, the spotlight shone over her eyes, which were enlarged in Disney Princess cartoon fashion. The advertisement ended with the young woman posing as if she were taking a selfie. It then cut to a grey screen with the slogan: 'For perfect selfies, download FaceTune now!' What the advert does not show is that the app also allows users to make bodily adjustments, creating impossibly small waists and round bottoms in Kardashian-Jenner style. The young women were keen to address its features and their effects during Rant:

Abigail launched into her rant with animation:

People use the photo editing apps to get more likes and these apps shouldn't be allowed, they are giving you body dysmorphia. Literally creating it when you've got this app out there. You pay £3 for it, I've seen it, it's called… what's it called? FaceTune! And everyone uses it but I promise you now, I don't. I would tell you because I'm dead open like that. But loads of my mates use it and they'll be sat in restaurants an that an you can just tell. Like I'll see my mate and I'll be like [*Mimes looking at her phone with an expression of horror*] "That doesn't even look like you". And I've said it to one of my mates before, I was like "People are going to be looking thinking that's not even you!"'

At this point Melissa swiftly turned around cutting Abigail off to give her take on this matter:

The amount of likes you get from using apps like that, it's like maybe that's how I should look, maybe I should get a bit of filler in my lips, maybe I should do that. But what does my head in is when you go on people's pages, if they post something other than a good quality selfie or something other than when they are going out or posting their outfit, if it's just the sky, if you've got a pretty picture of the sky that you want to post, you can see that it never gets as many likes as another picture.

Abigail interjected:

Yeah, and then we see these perfect selfies that are fake pictures of people's faces and bodies so then we think ours are horrible but they're not. [*Abigail looks down at*

her own body]. Like what's wrong with having a bit of a belly. Why is it so bad? I could just stand here all day ranting. Like what's wrong with it? Why is the world like this?

To begin with, Abigail and Melissa expressively demonstrate differences in their relationality to FaceTune. For instance, Abigail places importance on having never used the software and focuses primarily on how it impacts her friends, whereas Melissa, directly shares how using it has altered how she feels about herself. Despite this disparate starting point, the way in which they re-meet one another through shared dissent allows for moments of exchange and connection. Both participants consider FaceTune as a harmful app that negatively impacts young women's self-esteem, causing them to berate their own appearance.

Another significant resonance was their shared musing on the metric value of perfect images of female bodies in contrast to other aspects of life. This prompted Abigail to reflect on the impact of these narratives on her own body image. Looking down at herself she asked, 'What's wrong with having a bit of a belly? Why is it so bad?' Recalling Abigail's earlier critique of hyperbolised Instagram criticism such as 'You're obese', her line of questioning here indicates the circulatory effects of abuse aimed at those in closest proximity to 'the perfect' in relation to the thoughts and behaviours of those excluded from its direct remit. This question, followed by her later assertion of 'Why is the world like this?' contrasts self-governing remarks made by Abigail, previously examined in this thesis as revoking and re-instating postfeminist traditions of self-control and self-monitoring to successfully perform the most flattering angle. Rant, then, intervened with individualistic regimes of staging the body, causing Abigail to stop pointing the finger at herself and instead turn outwards to critique broader systems of power prescribing oppressive ideas and behaviours.

Additionally, the way Rant invites participants to actively interrupt one another fundamentally disrupts individualised experiences of navigating Instagram and self-exposure. Its framework foregrounded on embodied, spontaneous and interruptive outbursts is juxtaposed against the careful and well thought out nature of mentally staging and monitoring pleasing performances of the body and self. The act of interrupting is

important here, as it causes performers and spectators to pay attention to both the external discursive factors and the material aspects, such as physical presence and the fragility of the performing body. The unpredictability of this corporeal encounter, in tandem with the passionate interweaving of Instagram admonishments, works to normalise the failure of being able to control external relations without giving into nihilism or despair. In this way, the qualities of this performance invite the participants to make folds of relations through what Lauren Berlant describes as 'punk negativity', a sensibility that 'turns getting negated into a wilful act that moves the future around' (2016, p. 389). Explorations of the uncontrollable and unpredictable are re-made in order to produce new discursive-affective knowledges of relationality that are pitted against the requirement to display a resilient individuality.

Seeing Bodies

The work discussed in this section examines an embodied and collaborative exploration of the politics of visibility. Extending Augusto Boal's methods to Adrienne Rich's (1995) idea of re-vision, in this examination I focus on how aspects of the performance might allow participants to encounter collaborative ways of looking. Helpful here is Schneider's (2011) thinking that re-gesture allows for the creation of new meaning from an embodied standpoint. I claim that in technologically saturated times, participatory performance can offer new opportunities to mesh embodied gestures in ways that produce contrasting revelations to the individualised lived ordinary.

The performance work examined here took place during the final workshop, in which we began with an exploration of a series of Boalian 'mirror exercises' designed to help us 'see what we are looking at' (2002, p. 129). There are two more series of exercises developed by Boal to increase participants' capacity for critical observation, one of which is 'Image Theatre', discussed in the previous chapter, while the third involves physical moulding techniques. The mirror sequence primarily involves partner work, enabling participants to explore the roles of acting subject and mirroring image in a variety of ways. Boal stresses that the most important quality of this work is that the movements are detailed and exact (Ibid). This mode of exploration underlines Boal's foregrounding of 'the body as a way of

knowing' (Howe, 2019, p. 81), as the exercise encourages the participants to research each other's bodies meticulously, demonstrating their findings through mirrored gestures. The movements are slow and controlled; for instance, one exercise involves the participants swapping roles (e.g., the subject becomes an image and vice versa) without affecting the precision of the movements (Boal, 2002, p. 135). In this case, onlookers should be unable to tell who is leading the movement and who is following. The last exercise the young women explored in this sequence was the rhythmic mirror, in which participants are encouraged to mirror identical rhythms and movements that involve the whole body. They can be slow, fast, gentle or vigorous.

After studying their partners through this sequence, I proposed that we would build on this collectively with an exercise called 'Flock Dance', which involves the whole group creating a v shape with their bodies, emulating the formation taken by flocks of migratory birds, so that one person is the leader, and the others fall behind in two diagonal lines. A song is selected by the participants, to which the leader performs in improvisatory rhythmic movements. The goal is for the ensemble to attempt unification by mimicking the leader's actions. Just as migratory birds take turns being the leader, participants fall behind when it is the next person's turn to take the lead position until each participant has had their turn. The framework of this exercise stimulates a shared exploration of *looking at being looked at* and *seeing what we are looking at*. Spontaneously enacting and mirroring dance moves to a song of their choice encourages young women to invest in a critical yet playful, re-enactment on observing and displaying performances of the self.

The song selected by the young women was Ariana Grande's 'NASA'. It begins with a reimagining of Neil Armstrong's famous quote, voiced by drag queen Shangela Laquifa Wadley who instead says, 'One small step for woman, one giant leap for womankind'. Despite this reference to the collective, the song conveys a more straightforwardly individualistic message, making a number of references to the celestial to express a sentiment of Grande valuing her own space. I am interested in how the popular feminist mood of this song implicates the young women's participation in this exercise and how, in turn, their performance wrestles with and disturbs its individualistic characterisation.

The following describes the outcomes of Flock Dance with attention to moments of proximity, presence and connection:

> Excitedly, the young women took their positions, using their bodies to create a v shape. Rachel, who often was the last to put herself forward to perform, interestingly, took the central position at the front of the formation. The music kicked in filling the room, while the young women giggled and exchanged animated expressions. Some of them bobbed up and down, feeling the music through their bodies. Rachel began by taking three shuffles to the right and then 3 shuffles to the left. To start with the tempo of the song is relaxed, this meant that the rest of the group replicated Rachel's movements with ease. This simple movement allowed the group to feel robust as they banded together, effectively mirroring one another. After repeating this movement a few times Rachel yelled swap and looked directly at Melissa who smiled and confidently skipped into the lead position. Loudly singing the lyrics 'Baby, I know time apart is beneficial…', Melissa turned around to look at the other young women, causing them all to join in with a declaration of:
>
> It's like I'm the universe and you be N-A-S-A…
> I'ma need space, I'ma need space,
> You know I'm a star,
> Space, I'ma need space
>
> While they sang along to this more up-tempo chorus Melissa took two side steps to the right, putting her forearms horizontally in front of her face and opening them up to the sides with each step. All the young women mimicked this action with vigour, repeating it for the duration of the chorus.

Melissa's introduction of this strong and dynamic movement involving the whole body appeared to energise the ensemble. Its simplicity allowed the group to become almost wholly synchronised, strengthening the effect of this unifying movement. Intensifying this was Melissa's outburst of singing which stirred the group into action, causing them to collectively belt out the song's interior message, one derived from popular feminism: young women are independent, self-sufficient and don't invest in romantic sentiments of being inseparable from a lover. Considering the scene of popular feminism, the anti-romance message is a refreshing change in a pop category, historically dominated by love songs. However, I am interested in how the outcomes of this performance disturb the more insidious underlying languages of resilient individuality. As the exercise progresses, degrees of intimacy and connection are heightened through shared encounters of looking and displaying the body in ways that engage and intervene with individualised, disembodied experiences of staging performance on the self on Instagram.

Specifically, the following examination of the outcomes of this exercise focuses on how its framework allows for moments of exchange and connection through a playful exploration of the politics of visibility:

> During the chorus, Hannah performed the unified action with a huge smile beaming across her face. Though, when Melissa turned to Hannah signalling that it was her turn to take the lead position, Hannah could be heard making an audible yelp, demonstrating her alarm at being thrust into the lead position. Notably, however, this mood quickly shifted, as Hannah appeared to channel any discomfort into lampooning the dancing. Putting her hands on her hips, she performed a caricature of Mr Bean style dancing, swinging her hips from side to side in a purposely awkward fashion before using one foot to disjointedly shift around on the spot. The rest of the young women giggled as they joined in with these moves.

The change in Hannah's disposition underlines the tensions that emerge when the participant leading the dance perceives themselves to be looked at, while the rest of the participants are freed to experience their bodies through the movement. For the onlooking ensemble, the pressure to express themselves is eliminated – that is until it is their turn to become the focal point. When Hannah is thrust from her position of safety in the sidelines, her visible reluctance returns us to the phenomenon of expressive stasis, as the exercise vibrates with the tensions that emerge when gearing up to display one's body online for onlooking spectators. However, what was interesting was how this mood of reticence suddenly changed as Hannah seemed to switch from the standpoint of being looked at, to a playful exploration of looking at being looked at. Juxtaposing the seriousness with which the young women approach staging performances of the self on Instagram, Hannah made a comedic intervention that affectively traversed across the group as they gleefully resisted compliance with the considered approach to performing the body and self.

Another moment that visibly resonated with the group was Jessica's unpredictable approach to the exercise:

> Taking an entirely different approach to Hannah, Jessica took slow and sultry strides to the lead position. Self-admittingly, the most reserved member of the group, Jessica surprised us all when she arrived at the front throwing her hands up in the air and swirling both her arms and hips in unison as she twirled in a circle. Facing forward, Jessica crouched slightly while putting her hands on her knees and continued to twirl her hips – with all the confidence of rap sensation Megan The Stallion – to which some of the girls mouths dropped open, while the rest screeched in applause as they copied this dance move. Turning to face the back, she twerked on the spot before stomping into the centre of the V and swapping with Abigail.

During the performance, the group's emotive response demonstrated a recognition of how Jessica's performance enacted a revolt against modes of gendered containment that structure her normative behaviours of displaying the self. This was further supported by a comment made by Melissa during the post-project one-on-one interviews when she said:

> A lot of the boys in the class are like "Listen to me, listen to me. I want to go first. I want to do this. I want to do that." For the girls like Jessica to speak up and perform confidently – when she is usually like "I'll wait until I'm told to go" – it's a big deal.

The young women's embodied responses to Jessica's enactment during the final workshop illuminated how this surprising encounter moved them. Within such a discursive-affective encounter, there is an invitation to creatively and collaboratively renegotiate the processes of socialisation that occur as gendered performative beings. By taking their spectators by surprise, both Hannah and Jessica gave rise to a spectatorial state grounded in presence and proximity, in which active reception allows for embodied re-vision and in turn, the revision of gendered configurations of staging and performing the self. The gendered self is encountered not as a fixed essence but as a site of struggle and change. Additionally, I observe that this mode of expression offers potential to transcend the contemporary internalisation of the male gaze (Gill, 2008), through an experimental process of *looking at being looked at*. Consequently, from the perspective of the performer embodied re-gesture can produce a critical consciousness of the gender-laden power dynamics of visibility. This demonstrates the power of performance to enable participants to explore new modes of gender critique collaboratively.

During the exercise, there were times when the group was totally synchronised, other times, the young women were united in complementary rhythms, which were slightly different, often harmonious but occasionally not. In this way, this exercise performs the conditions of collaborative knowledge production that occurred during the workshop project. It was particularly interesting to witness the heightened sense of enjoyment expressed by the young women during those moments of heightened synchronicity:

> When the chorus came in Abigail repeated the movement that Melissa had chosen for the first chorus. This got a big reaction from the young women, Sarah shouted 'Yes lad, AHA!

This is so good!' All the young women were beaming at this point with big smiles on their faces repeating the move that now felt familiar for the duration of the chorus.

The way the group registers Abigail's re-enactment of Melissa's chorus action demonstrates a heightening of intimacy, connection, dialogue and collaboration. This doubling of mimesis served to further animate their gestures and expressions, inviting a collective declaration of glee in performing in unison. Then it was Sarah's turn, the last of the group to take centre stage:

Looking extremely apprehensive she shouted, 'I can't dance'.

Notably, Sarah's enjoyment in taking part in the exercise was not enough to dispel discomfort at being centrally placed:

Melissa dismissed this, asserting 'Go on Sarah. Steal the show'. Maintaining a nervous disposition, Sarah turned around to look at Abigail who said, 'Go on Sarah, just feel the music, GO!' Sarah tentatively broke into a simple but effective move of stepping four times to the right, then repeating this on the left, while creating a wave motion with her arms. At a loss for what to do next, Sarah looked back at Melissa for inspiration. Though Sarah was acting as the leader the group took their cue from Melissa and they all leaned back with their upper bodies, rotating their arms around and circling their hips slowly. At this point the song came to an end, the young women broke into celebration, throwing their arms in the air while cheering and clapping.

Sarah's participation in this exercise demonstrates a heightened awareness of how the gender regime can make displaying the body – even for playful purposes – a fearful endeavour. Indeed, if your body has been historically objectified and, consequently, gripped by a gendered and classed expressive stasis when pressured to take centre-stage on Instagram, encouragement to perform for a group of onlooking spectators could feel less benign and, for some, much more uncomfortable. In Berenice Fisher's work, she raises concerns over exploring Boal's observational sequences with Women's Studies students, as she found that, 'Displaying the body was as gender-laden an activity as touching: both could give women pleasure but either might signal vulnerability and danger' (Fisher, 1993, p. 193). I recognise Fisher's concerns; however, I am in alignment with Howe when she argues that these tensions are not a reason to avoid this style of working with participants. This variation of the mirror sequence allows for an embodied examination of systems of power,

which is central to reimagining practices of TO, to address specific social relations, such as negotiating online visibility and exposure.

I felt reassured in facilitating this mode of exploration when amongst the clamour I overheard the following remarks:

> Melissa: Wow.
> Hannah: That was so good.
> Sarah: That was exceptional, I'm not going to lie.
> Rachel: That was therapeutic, did anyone else feel that?

This underlined the joy of creatively inhabiting the commons. As in the previous chapter, there was another reference to the therapeutic nature of this work, signalling an awareness of personal fulfilment or growth. However, the following line of questioning, '…did anyone else feel that?' brings an awareness of the live, social dimension of this exploration and its powerful effect. Important, here, is Sarah's discomfort with taking centre-stage in this exercise, as it is a reminder that while proximity, intimacy and connection might provide some relief and joy it does not necessarily provide an individual sense of empowerment or resilience. Instead of this work signalling individualising notions of resilience and repair, it provides a cushion, or a space of refuge, where a particular form, an assemblage is recognised as a useful tactic to not only survive but to 'trouble troubling times' (Berlant, 2016).

Feeling Bodies

After the workshop project had ended, I met once more with the young women to conduct one-on-one interviews to discuss their experiences of the process. The individual post-project interviews, in comparison to the collaborative embodied performance work, formed a basis for assessing the young women's reflections on changes in their feelings surrounding themselves, each other and their negotiation of online visibility. Six of the ten participants took part in this final element. I examined key links between the observations put forward in these interviews, prior group discussions and performance work. I found that the young women acknowledged a heightened awareness of their own practices of engaging with Instagram. Additionally, there was a common theme across the interviews in which the

young women identified how the project had enabled them to re-meet each other, allowing them to consider the practices of others and recognise physically inhabiting the commons as a tactic to disrupt individualised subject positions. When analysing the outcomes of re-meeting, there was a notable emphasis on the acquisition of both discursive and embodied knowledge.

Speaking about an increase in her overall awareness of personal Instagram behaviours, Jessica indicated that prior to the project, she hadn't given Instagram much critical thought. However, taking part led her to think:

> Jessica: Woah, this is where like some of my anxiety has come from. I'm still anxious about posting but I think my perspective on Instagram has changed like how I think about it – it feels less heavy if that makes sense?

In this way, Jessica describes her sense that through taking part in the workshop project, some of the pressure associated with Instagram has eased. A lessening of heaviness, in this instance, seems to refer to the mental weight of responsibility, though it could also pertain to a decline of the importance or seriousness associated with Instagram. The latter was apparent in Abigail's account in which she explained how the project had caused her to set a personal goal of taking Instagram less 'seriously', as she stated:

> Abigail: I'm quite funny and outgoing and a laugh but on there, I'm all serious.

Moreover, she described how she had been able to incorporate learning encountered during the sessions to become more present in everyday life:

> Abigail: Like the other day I caught on, my mum has just got the living room decorated, new wall paper and I went "Oh that will look lovely that when I get my picture taken in that dress cause it will merge in with the wall paper" an I went "Oh my god, Instagram is the first thing I think of!"

Here, Abigail demonstrates how the work has allowed her to interrupt mental processes of staging Instagrammability that occur in what I have termed the rehearsal space of the mind, through a reimagination of Goffman's (1959) backstage area.

Melissa's critical awareness took on a related but different form. Reflecting on particular exercises that we explored during the project caused her to appreciate, in her words, 'real

life moments and connections'. For instance, Melissa refers to an exercise in which we explored, again, as she put it, 'if Instagram wasn't a thing'. Throughout the workshop project, there were many occasions when the young women would say they wished they lived in a world without Instagram. This would often involve them reminiscing about a simpler time when they were not Instagram users or when it was taken a lot less seriously. To explore this further, I facilitated an exercise entitled 'A World without Instagram'. In a similar way to 'Instagram vs Reality', this exercise drew from Boal's framework of Forum Theatre and involved a scenario being played out in two differing contexts. Firstly, the scenario was improvised from the standpoint of reality, in which the young women were encouraged to enact how the scenario would play out in everyday life. However, the second performance provided the opportunity to explore the scenario from a different embodied standpoint, to practice how one might think or act differently in a world completely removed from the pressures of Instagram.

In one exploration of this exercise, in which Melissa was involved, the participants challenged the gendered constraints on the temporal organisation of young women's lives when in pursuit of capturing 'the perfect' (McRobbie, 2020) in digital contexts. For instance, exploring the scenario of being on holiday in a context where the pressures of Instagram are felt, Abigail and Melissa played the role of two young women who, on the first day of their holiday, set an alarm to wake them up early enough so that they could carry out necessary procedures of beautification, as they wanted to go on a sightseeing excursion to the waterfalls in order to secure an Instagrammable picture that would raise their social status. However, the second scene is played out with a different outcome:

> Abigail turns to Melissa and says, 'Do you know what, I am dying to just lay by the pool and order cocktails, read our books and just chill'. A big smile spreads across Melissa's face, before saying 'That sounds perfect. I just think we've both worked really hard and we just deserve to relax.'

In a world without Instagram, the young women enact lying in, making coffee and lounging in bed while deciding what they should do on their first day of holiday. Reflecting on what this exercise stirred in Melissa, she said:

> Melissa: So, I think, imagine as if it wasn't a thing, to help me to appreciate real life moments and connections rather than just going on your phone because you know it's there. It's like actually taking in the fact that it's there but I'm going to pretend that it's not just to experience things in real life, rather than making yourself sad or giving yourself these high expectations that you see online.

This underlines the possibilities of re-worlding Instagram as a method of making future interventions. In particular, Melissa reflects on the upset caused when broaching every social situation with aspirations of staging and capturing a perfectly Instagrammable picture. Melissa also notes the troubling feelings that can arise through comparing your current situation to the curated lives encountered through Instagram. Embodied exploration of staging gendered performances of the body and self is underlined as heightening the affective capacity of re-gesture to, as Schneider puts it, '…trip the otherwise daily condition of repetition into reflexive hyper-drive…' (2011, p. 14). Consequently, expressive stasis is taken up here as an agentive strategy to feel more corporeally present and to withdraw from gendered and classed conceptual cycles of rehearsing and staging the body or the self. Additionally, this moves away from entering every situation with the view to put oneself or one's life digitally on display, providing the opportunity to disconnect not only from individualised practices of measuring the perfect-imperfect (McRobbie, 2020) but also to interrupt resilience languages that place an emphasis embracing one's flaw and loving one's body (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Rather than an adoption of #bodypositivity there is a move towards the uptake of body-neutrality in terms of how the body is being read and greater focus on the live, sensing body.

The accounts discussed so far underline the young women's personal learnings. However, most prominently, the participants linked changes in their personal awareness to instances of collaborative knowledge production. For instance, in each of their individual interviews Rachel, Melissa, Jessica, Sarah and Katy described moments of learning that occurred to them as a result of broaching the issues of Instagram through group work:

> Melissa: I think I'll take away hearing other people's opinions on things that you might not have even thought of or even that you have thought of and knowing that other people are thinking that too. It's like we all want change, it's not just me sitting on my phone feeling upset, being like 'it's just me that wants change, it's never going to happen'. We are all upset even though you do hear people say 'things need to change online' like there is people like Jameela Jamil who promotes things that need to get changed but I've never really got deep with the girls about this stuff like the work we've done in the sessions. Like even someone

like Abigail who posts more than the rest of us an like you see the fact that she goes out a lot and does this and that and like she thinks the same as me too [*a look of disbelief spreads across Melissa's face*], she questions what she posts the same way I question what I post. You think wow like that's crazy that you think that too, I had no idea that you did.

Rachel: I've never explored it with other people an like listening and seeing people act out their experiences, it's made me a lot less self-conscious when I'm on social media an it's made me realise like take a step back an look at stuff, do you know what I mean? Like there's people that I've looked at and thought ahh this is what I think of you, like I wish I was like, I wish I had friends like you, I wish I had this, I wish I had that. Then I realised they think the exact same way I do about it. An also, I've made bonds with like people out there that I didn't realise were possible because I'm like I relate to you, and you relate to me and we didn't realise that, do you know what I mean? Like 'girl power' [*Said while laughing*].

Jessica: I remember people telling stories or acting out things and it's been like I wasn't the only one. It felt quite homely in a way, it felt very intimate. An I think it was good with the group we had because we are quite a diverse group of girls an I think we are all really special in our own ways, I think I have got to know my friends a lot more with this exercise and I just think there's so much more to see now.

Sarah: [I think I'll take away] that people think the same as me. I, every single thing I think, I think that out of the 9 billion people in the world I am the only person thinking it. It's made me think obviously I'm not the only person thinking it. Hearing similar things and relating to what is being acted out makes me think at least I'm not crazy because other people think the same thing.

Katy: when we came the first week, we were like it's proper like cleansing your mind to think like you're not the only one going through what everyone goes through. In reality, like we are all actually going through the same things, so then that's why I liked coming.

There is a shared emphasis here on a sense of surprise encountered when learning that they were not alone, both in their feelings of upset and frustration, and in their experiences of self-monitoring and surveillance. I was particularly struck by this, especially when considering the broader cultural conjuncture in which concerns were mounting regarding the negative impact of young women's exposure to perfect bodies on Instagram. For instance, as Melissa notes, at the time of the workshop project, popular feminist icon and British actress Jameela Jamil had launched a series of social media campaigns, condemning Influencer-favourite laxative based 'Skinny Tea' detoxes and photoshopping applications such as FaceTune.[24] Despite the increasing popularity and visibility of such arguments on

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[24] For media coverage of these social media campaigns see: Nicholson, R. (2018) 'Let's get behind Jameela Jamil's war on airbrushing', *The Guardian*, 4 December. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/shortcuts/2018/dec/04/jameela-jamil-war-on-airbrushing-beauty-fashion (Accessed: 17 March 2023).

their Instagram timelines, the young women's shock at the parallels in their experiences underlines the ramifications of the contemporary individualising address and the pathologisation of those young women who feel they cannot live up to the 'can do' logic of resilience languages. This is particularly stark when Sarah notes 'at least I am not crazy' in relation to these newfound knowledges of relationality.

Popular feminism's presence at the time of the workshop project can also be detected when Rachael declares 'girl power' to summarise her experiences of thinking and acting collaboratively on this topic for the first time. As Sarah Banet-Weiser has acknowledged, the phrase girl power, as well as other women's empowerment rhetoric, has become commonly emblazoned across notepads, t-shirts, mugs and other accoutrements in recent times (2018; 2020). While demonstrating positive changes specifically with regard to the prior postfeminism moment, the mediation of popular feminism has been analysed and critiqued in relation to how it is marshalled by institutions of contemporary capitalism. In contrast to this, Rachael's espousal of 'girl power' can be identified as encapsulating her new sense of proximity to her peers, undergirded by a new shared sense of relationality. Specifically, the young women's reflection above demonstrates a new heightened awareness of defective individualised processes of consuming Instagram. All their accounts reflect how their experiences of sameness, connection and collaboration during the workshop project act as glitches producing a contrasting revelation to what had been the individualised lived ordinary.

In what follows, Rachel describes her reflections on how the collaborative element helped her to push experiences of negotiating Instagram out of her head and, as she puts it, off her chest through participation in the workshop project:

> Rachel: After each session it feels like you've got something off your chest and you can all relate to each other and bounce off each other and stuff like that an it's like, I feel like it sounds so ridiculous but we've helped each other grow like throughout these sessions. I didn't think I'd be sitting here now thinking oh yeah this was a really good experience, I really enjoyed staying after college on a Thursday. I thought I'd still be sitting there in my shell, like okay this stuff in my mind can just stay in there. I feel like having the group there was like boom, boom, boom.

Metaphorically, Rachel can be seen as exiting the mental rehearsal space through entering the embodied workshop space, to encounter new modes of interpersonal engagement. The description of her experience of the group as feeling like 'boom, boom, boom' underlines the limitations of words to account for the felt sense of the workshop project. Abigail's reflections on the workshop project are strikingly similar to Rachel's as they both identify a sense of pushing out individualised thoughts, feelings and experiences through the workshop project. Abigail also notes the positive impact this has had on her:

> Abigail: Every time I come out of the classes I always felt like positive about myself, do you know what I mean? Because we are getting everything off our chest and we're all young and we've all, even though we are all different personalities and all different people and into different things, when we've been in this room, we all go out there thinking oh she's a nice girl. I know it's acting class but you're acting as different people, you're not being you and then when you're all talking and acting out your issues, you're like ahh she's actually a really nice person. It's been good for me really, I said to the girls the other week like I feel better in myself just exploring what's going on in our lives. An it is all to do with social media at the end of the day which is quite sad but it is the world we live in isn't it?

In particular, the novel framing of these encounters highlights gaps in attention to young people's experiences of social media in school and college. This further illuminates the violence of individualistic popular feminist resilience languages, as we can see how re-meeting each other to share on these matters works to dislodge a sense of isolation. McRobbie (2020, p. 54) draws on Butler's (Butler, 2005, p. 81) idea of 'relational politics' to envisage a social theory inspired by asking 'Who are you?' in order to examine the political power of exploring our relationality to each other. With this McRobbie situates relationality as promising an ethics of anti-violence, as practices of relational politics provide opportunities to disrupt individualised resilience logic. As previously noted, literature and psychoanalytical practice are put forward as viable modes to disturb the notion of a self-standing and self-sufficient subjectivity (McRobbie, 2020, p. 67). I suggest that this research underlines the strength of applied theatre to facilitate a multidimensional experience of relationality, as a consequence of the unique way knowledge develops when using a combination of discussion and embodiment to re-meet one another in shared experiences. Relational politics may be encountered discursively, though, but the additional emphasis on embodiment provides multiple entry points to communicate 'I am my relation to you' (Butler, 2005, p. 81) through encountering speaking, seeing and feeling bodies.

For Jessica, Abigail and Rachel, taking part in Flock Dance is recognised as a standout moment demonstrating an embodied sense of connectivity shared with the rest of the group:

> Jessica: That dance that we did, that was so good. I was thinking for us all to do that together, it was a nice note to end on, it showed how we've all come together.
>
> Rachel: …I did enjoy [the exercises] so much especially that dance, I was sitting there like "woo hoo". I feel like that finished it on the best note ever and now every time I hear that song I'm like sitting there I'm like [*a big smile spreads across Rachel's face*], the BA musicals that were [performing] in the Echo [Arena], before the shows like that song came on an I was sitting there and I'm going ahh my little heart, an it was just like it was so good.
>
> Abigail: I remember when it started, I was excited about it because I'm obsessed with Instagram and I was thinking oh what's going to go on here, this will be good. So I just got excited about it, I was like oh I'm going to come and then I got really into to it. I was thinking I feel like that dance we did shows the connection we've built over the weeks. I'm sad it's ending. I feel like we need it in place, you know, just to help us.

These accounts indicate the affective capacity of embodied and collaborative performance processes to sensitise participants to the pleasure of coming together and sharing in their experiences. There is a sense that in a different way to learning about the textual dimensions of their experiences, their attempts at embodied synchronicity in Flock Dance spoke much louder than words ever could, producing a corporeal feeling registered by the body, in turn, creating a new understanding of the power of the commons, in highly individualised times of technological saturation. These accounts can be identified as encapsulating a new sense of proximity to their peers and possibly a new sense of belonging. However, in analysing these encounters of inhabiting common ground and space, I take influence from Berlant in my reluctance to draw on the critical theory discourse of belonging, as I agree with them when they write, 'Just because we are in the room together does not mean that we belong to the room or each other' (2016, p. 395). Instead, I am inclined to extend Berlant's thinking to how embodied encounters of proximity inform understandings of what is broken in sociality, introducing new processes to challenge social norms. In particular, I claim that applied theatre can introduce new discursive-affective knowledges that might, as Abigail notes, 'help' young women to disrupt notions of resilient individuality that undergird young women's experiences of their mediated social worlds.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the way participatory performance attends to both the discursive and the material, displacing participants from individualised subject positions and instead locating them in a multidimensional landscape of relations, systems and affects. The applied theatre workshop environment creates an ecosystem in which the individual is always part of a larger corporeally orientated relationship between bodies, practices, discourses and technologies. This, in turn, illuminates the ways in which young women are implicated by external gendered forces that are uncontrollable and unpredictable. I claim that the inherent qualities of performance, then, afford a new critical approach to contemporary feminist media narratives of resilience, self-control and self-sufficiency. Specifically, I have observed how collaborative forms of speaking, seeing and feeling through the body underline the harmful nature of mediated discourses of resilient individuality. I have analysed this through performance exercises that have allowed participants to re-meet one another in ways that dislodge both individualised experiences and coping methods that play out in relation to Instagram cultures.

I situate this analysis as demonstrating the necessity of facilitating these types of projects in educational contexts. Here, I reassert the previously stated hesitancy and reluctance I encountered in pursuit of facilitating this type of work. This project suggests that as adults, practitioners, scholars and educators we must not dismiss or fear the implications of exploring 'social media drama', but should instead trust young women's ability to critique and explore these issues in critical and playful ways. In the conclusion of this thesis, I address the broader political economy and the subsequent limitations on providing these types of extra-curricular opportunities for young people.

Conclusion

In the weeks after completing the workshop project at the centre of this thesis, we entered the extraordinary times of the coronavirus pandemic. The isolation of repeated lockdowns increased the necessity of accessing life through digital planes. One outcome was a rise in the popularity of TikTok, a short form video hosting service, gaining its eminence through the prevalence of trends such as dance routine challenges to popular songs. With the outside world at a standstill, many people, especially generation z, took to TikTok to fill an afternoon by learning one of the dexterous but not impossible dance routines from Charli D'Amelio, who at the time was the most followed person on TikTok at age 16.

Since then, Charli and her sister Dixie have become incredibly famous, documented in a recent reality television series following their move from Connecticut to the bright lights of Los Angeles. While its predecessor *Keeping up with the Kardashians* (2007 – 2020), worked to glamourise the sisters' assent to fame, *The D'Amelio Show* (2021) urges its audience to take seriously the toll such visibility can take with a specific focus on the struggle of *successfully* staging and performing the self on social media. Specifically, it illuminates their experience of what Hund and Duffy (2019) describe as the professional content creator 'visibility mandate'. In accordance with Hund and Duffy's analysis, the sisters attempt to carefully toe the line between appearing perfect and yet authentic (Ibid). This contradictory charade is carried out with constant prods of hate and critique from their followers with devastating effects[25]. This cycle leaves the D'Amelio sisters anxiety ridden, overwrought with self-doubt and terrified of making the *wrong* move.

Consequently, a focal point of the show centres around times in which both Charli and Dixie are gripped by an inability to post, or what I have described in this research as expressive stasis. Similarly to the young women engaged in the workshop project, the sisters lift the curtain on time spent in the rehearsal room of the mind, where they cognitively weigh up the worthiness of a particular post to be shared on TikTok or Instagram, only to decide that

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[25] Both of the young women describe their experiences of poor mental health due to online exposure and criticism. Dixie D'Amelio also notes how these experiences have impacted bouts of depression and suicidal ideation.

exposing oneself is too risky. This demonstrated to me that you do not need to be socially disadvantaged to encounter expressive stasis; you can indeed be TikTok famous and share the sentiments expressed by the young women in this research. Whilst I do not claim that the phenomenon of expressive stasis can be generalised to speak to the experiences of all young women in the West engaging with social media, it clearly articulates understandings of accustomed experiences of negotiating digital cultures of visibility and exposure.

One of the central contributions of this thesis has been to examine expressive stasis in relation to power. In particular, I have drawn from the accounts and performance explorations of white, working class young women to analyse how they negotiate the invitation to stage and perform the self and body online. Feminist cultural and media theorists have been attentive to a contemporary expectation for girls and young women to put themselves 'on display', in addition to making their bodies digitally visible, there is an expectation to express their inner thoughts, opinions and tastes confidently (Harris, 2004; Dobson, 2016). I have demonstrated the extent to which the young women equate digital visibility with the opportunity to prove one is 'living life' and, in turn, gain power and status. While it has not been the focus of this thesis, it is important to note that for some girls and young women – like Charli and Dixie D'Amelio – online exposure can produce power and economic capital for themselves – while also producing a key source of financial gain for social media companies. The D'Amelio sisters are a particularly interesting case to examine against the backdrop of this research, as prior to gaining major brand endorsement and walking many of the red carpets of Hollywood, they were everyday girls whose viral success came as a surprise. However, the sisters were already privileged in a variety of ways, particularly as girls who are white, middle class and normatively attractive in gendered terms. It is also notable that the promise of power and wealth through online visibility perpetuated by social media cultures is not always a false proposition.

Against the backdrop of this cultural landscape, I situate a refusal to be regularly visible online as an act of confronting and highlighting contemporary gendered visual conventions. The heightening of technological saturation has provided a broader understanding that the visibility and exposure inherent in performing the self on social media makes girls and women open to scrutiny, judgement and surveillance. I have claimed that the young

women's habitual refusal to post underlines the broader social investment in the *right* ways to do femininity online, illuminating the gendered, classed and raced scopic economy of recent times. Within this context, when the D'Amelio sisters return to self-exposure practices, they do so from a privileged understanding of the economic promises that circulate around their ability to cash out on their visibility. Specifically, in this thesis I forward discussions around how white, working class young women investing in Instagram cultures are addressed as both subjects of potential but are positioned outside of the direct remit of particular popular feminist subjective formations such as the perfect-imperfect-resilience. This is because they perceive themselves and their social location as not perfect enough to successfully stage 'the perfect' and too imperfect to pull off staged performances of 'the imperfect'. I have examined the phenomena of expressive stasis in relation to contemporary feminisms, where we have the #girlboss empowerment rhetoric touted by influencer cultures of the spectacularly feminine, alongside messages of body positivity disseminated across Hollywood films and global advertisement campaigns. Having considered this scene throughout this thesis, I have grown particularly wary of the social and cultural value attached to demonstratable resilience and self-esteem, as contributing to the pathologisation of those whose lack of social media output indicates low resilience.

Rather than situating Instagram anxieties as low resilience, I suggest that a refusal to post can be considered a strategy to survive heightened pressures to successfully put oneself on display. The media practices I have examined in this thesis are examples of the way young women re-negotiate the demands placed on them to get by and survive complex cultural, social, economic and political conditions. As noted in this thesis, I am particularly wary of time consuming private modes of mental labour carried out in the hope of securing a digital display worthy of being made visible. However, I also understand this time spent in the rehearsal room of the mind's eye – staging a digitally flattened self – as a mode of negotiating compulsory engagement in social media cultures. My biggest concern is how these practices contribute to lived experiences where the subject, who is deeply invested in reading social media landscapes, becomes alienated from the materiality of their body and felt encounters with others. I am wary that this contributes to adopting resilience strategies that are intensely individualised and removed from corporeally held knowledge.

This thesis has advanced a discussion around the value of applied theatre not only to explore the interpretation of contemporary femininity and popular feminisms but to provide opportunities to interfere with these alienating and individualising times. Through a polyphonic analysis, attending to the discursive and the affective, I have tested the power of participatory performance to build on the presumptions from feminist media and cultural studies and gender and digital media theory, to re-examine what is at stake for everyday young women negotiating social media. Additionally, I suggest that the creative process of re-worlding offers opportunities to re-encounter digital worlds in ways that benefit girls and young women. These benefits lie in the affective, spatial and temporal qualities of participatory performance, emphasising presence, proximity, collaboration, contact and exchange. These qualities underline the capacity of re-worlding to bring a heightened quality of liveness to a resolutely surface phenomenon, enabling participants to draw on and share embodied knowledge to re-consider what is known about successful performances of the self and the structures that foreground such knowledge. Further, it is alliances formed within the context of the unpredictable workshop environment that call into question harmful strands of popular feminism that privilege individualistic notions of control and resilience.

Concluding Thoughts: Bridges and Barriers

This research has demonstrated the potential of bridging the scholarship of feminist cultural and media studies; gender and digital media; and applied theatre. Given that contexts prioritising material presence, embodiment and corporeal perception are still not well trodden in the fields of feminist media and cultural studies, developments have been articulated here that might be considered relatively novel. Applied theatre contexts provide different forms of texts and affects through which young women's participation with Instagram may be understood. Further to this, I have underlined the significance of feminist cultural and media scholarship concerning contemporary femininities and feminisms when examining applied theatre projects carried out with girls and young women. In particular, I suggest that drawing on these feminist critiques is advantageous for carrying out work that creates opportunities to challenge and disrupt individualistic languages of self-production. While there is much to garner from feminist cultural and media studies theorists, this thesis

aims to underline that we, as feminist applied theatre researcher-practitioners, have something to give them in return: a feminist criticism underlining the political power of embodiment and liveness to intervene with technological processes of alienation and mediatised narratives of individualisation. Accordingly, this thesis has tied concepts of cultural subjects, digital users and participatory performers to highlight significant exchanges between these fields of enquiry across discursive and affective registers.

Returning to Abigail's declaration that they 'really need' something like the workshop project in place, it is crucial to observe the worrying barriers obstructing access to both the arts and enrichment initiatives in education. Currently, the Conservative government's utilitarian education policies narrow the opportunities for state school students, threatening to restrict these opportunities to the privileged few. This thesis has contributed to a discourse underlining theatre and performance as powerful tools to develop understandings of the self and others and to re-encounter embodied experiences in ways that produce multidimensional knowledges across interior and exterior registers. These qualities nurture a layered approach to critical thinking that allows participants to explore how social standards are felt and known and question how these expectations and requirements come to be normalised. However, since Michael Gove's introduction of the English baccalaureate (Ebacc) system in 2010, an incentive to focus on "core" subjects – English, maths and sciences –enrolment in arts GCSEs has fallen by 40%, and the number of arts teachers has decreased by 23% (Guardian, 2023). The Ebacc, which excludes all arts subjects, is the core basis for determining a school's performance. However, private schools are not bound by these same progress monitoring systems and are free to provide the education and extracurricular activities that they deem most advantageous for their pupils (Ashton and Ashton, 2022). Meanwhile, via the Ebacc the government disseminates the harmful message that the arts hold little market value and education should be a training ground for the labour market. Despite this, recent research has found that private schools are investing substantial resources in the arts, providing an increasingly important role in the student experience they provide (Ibid).

Increasing austerity cuts since 2009 have made this bleak picture more adverse for state school students. Spending per student in England has fallen by 9% in real terms (Sibieta,

2022). Following over a decade of finite investment, pupils in state schools, particularly in deprived areas, are far less likely to have access to school enrichment activities such as after school theatre clubs (Fraser and Hawksbee, 2022). One of the key barriers to delivering workshop projects like the one analysed in this thesis is cuts to support staff, which means that overstretched teachers have little capacity to provide extracurricular activities. This means that the idea that schools are not just a vehicle to pass examinations is limited to the middle and upper middle classes. The analysis I have carried out in this thesis suggests that socially disadvantaged young women find their own ways of surviving troubling times. However, the necessity to survive orients the self towards individualised forms of resilience, reinforcing harmful popular feminist social frameworks, creating intensely isolated subject positions.

Appendix 1: Workshop Plans

Group discussions and creative explorations were semi-structured. Encouraging open approaches to dialogue and performance, I introduced topics, themes and exercises to guide the participants to explore their own ideas and interpretations.

Session 1 Workshop Plan

Icebreaker/Check in:
Each participant is asked to enact a statement and a gesture in response to specific words, such as

- Instagram
- Likes
- Followers
- Posting
- Posing

Warm up: The surprise guest exercise: Instagram Edition
Someone volunteers to be the host, there is three partygoers. The host leaves the room, the audience picks three Instagram influencers or celebrities for the guests to play. The guests are advised to start their characterisation small and then add more hints related to their online presence. The host will try to guess who the guests are.

Group Principals
Participants will be asked to work together to determine principals for meeting as a group on a large piece of paper with pens.

Group discussion
Prompts:
- What are your reasons for using Instagram?
- What do you like about it?
- What don't you like about it?

Creative exercise: The Advantages of Being a Young Woman on Instagram
The stimuli of the Guerrilla Girls 'The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist' poster is shared with the young women, followed by a brief discussion of the style of work they do. The participants are asked to work in small groups to draw from the poster to create their own satirical statements about 'The Advantages of Being a Young Woman on Instagram'; these statements will then be explored through embodied still images.

Check out:
Each participant is asked to share one something that they will take away from the first session.

Session 2 Workshop Plan

Check in
Each participant is asked to reflect on their week by sharing an event in the form of a news headline.

Warm up: Morning Routine
This exercise involves each participant finding a space in the room to enact their morning routine from the moment they wake up to the moment they leave their homes for college, with attention to the minute details of everyday life.

Ground rules
Ground rules are read aloud by one of the participants.

Group discussion
I will start by explaining how I have used their insights and creative explorations to structure the workshop. Specifically, last week, the participants voiced their experiences of not posting often, wanting to take break from Instagram and the fear of missing out. For that reason, we will be exploring these topics during session 2.

Discussion prompt:

- What are some of the things that make you feel like you want to take a break from Instagram?

Creative exercise 1: I remember when…
This exercise begins with a creative writing element. The participants are asked to start their writing with the prompt 'I remember when…'. They will be given five minutes to reflect on a time when they considered or decided to take a break from Instagram.

After this, in small groups, the participants are asked to share their stories, if they feel happy to do so. They will then choose one story and enact three still images with their bodies to encapsulate this story. They will then share the sequences with the rest of the group.

I will ask the participants to reflect on the mood portrayed by these sequences.

Creative exercise 2: Instagram vs Reality
This exercise begins with the participants forming an audience. They are then asked to pick a list of everyday scenarios, such as a night out, date, party etc. Two-three people put themselves forward to perform a particular scenario for the rest of the group. In the first instance, the scenario is performed in the context of Instagrammability; everything is polished and perfected. At some point during the enactment, I will say freeze. One of the participants will tap someone on the shoulder to leave the scene, and it will be performed a second time. With this performance, the social mask of Instagrammability will be lifted, and it will be performed in the context of reality.

Check out

Each participant is asked to share one word to describe how they are feeling as the session comes to a close.

Session 3 Workshop Plan

Check in:
Describe your week so far in the form of a weather report.

Warm up: Columbian Hypnosis
This exercise, taken from Augusto Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (2002), involves the participants working in partners to explore a non-touching form of sculpting. One participant holds the palm of her hand and hovers it over different body parts of their partner, who moves said body part as if hypnotised, maintaining about 20 centimetres distance at all times. The hypnotiser sculpts their partner into a variety of positions. They take turns taking the lead.

Ground rules
Ground rules are read aloud by one of the participants.

Group discussion
I will start by telling the participants that we will be building on previous themes raised around influencer and celebrity culture on Instagram and how they push certain consumer products.

Discussion prompts:
- What is the difference between celebrities and influencers?
- What types of products do they advertise on Instagram?

Creative exercise 1, part 1: Sculpting
Working in partners, participants select one celebrity/influencer. One partner will play the role of the sculptor, moulding the other into the chosen famous figure selling a particular item. They can use a hands on approach or draw from Columbian Hypnosis to carry out their sculpting.

Creative exercise 1, part 2: Sculpting and Commenting
The participants develop this still image into a short scene, with one advertising the product as a celebrity/influencer would on Instagram and the other enacting and commenting on what might be going on in the head of the everyday person viewing the advertisement.

Check out:
Participants are asked to use one word to describe their experience of the work.

Session 4 Workshop Plan

Check in: The boasting circle
Each participant steps into the centre of the circle and makes a positive declaration about themselves and then strikes a pose that embodies this declaration.

Warm up: Milling exercise:
The participants are asked to mill around the space. When instructed to do so, two participants walk up to one another, make eye contact and take a moment to slow down and breathe without speaking to one another. Participants are invited to pay attention to their thoughts, judgements and fears as they stand facing each other. Then they are invited to see if they can let go of all thoughts and ideas and simply feel the other person's presence.

They are then asked to mill around the space again. When instructed to so the participants partner up again. They are asked to make eye-contact and share something about the way they are feeling.

Creative exercise 1: Rant
Participants are asked to make a list of topics linked to Instagram that they would like to Rant about. Three or more people stand on stage with their backs to the audience. When one of the themes from the list is called out, one person turns around and begins to rant about whatever the word sparked in them. This continues until someone else turns around and cuts them off.

Group Discussion:
This discussion sets out to build on the many comments made over the course of the workshop project concerning the process of staging performances of the self for Instagram.

Discussion prompts:

- What goes into the process of posting?
- If you decide to post what happens after you have posted?

Creative exercise 2: Waiting Poem
Drawing on Faith Wilding's piece of performance art *Waiting*, this exercise implores the participants to explore experiences of waiting when it comes to posting a picture online:
1. Participants are asked to explore a sense of waiting from an embodied standpoint.
2. The participants are asked to spontaneously create their own list poem, individually adding a line at a time to bring their experiences into conversation.
3. A combination of the embodied performance of waiting and the list poem is explored.

Check out:
Participants are asked to perform one gesture to represent how they feel about this session.

Session 5 Workshop Plan

Check in:
Embody an emoji to describe how you are feeling today.

Warm up: Mirroring exercises
Drawing from Boal's (2002) mirror sequences, in partners, the participants are asked to explore mirroring in a variety of ways:
1. One person becomes the subject and the other the mirror. Looking directly into each other's eyes, the subject starts to make a series of changes in their facial expression and their physical movements. The mirror must copy right down to the smallest detail. The idea is to achieve synchronisation through slow and controlled movements. A spectator should not be able to tell who is leading the movements. In order to explore this.
2. Participants will be asked to swap roles without effecting the precision of the movements.
3. They will then explore being both the subject and the mirror; from this point on each partner has the freedom to move but both partners should perform these movements in a synchronised manner.
4. The last mirror sequence will explore mirroring rhythmic movements, each partner will take turns leading movements that can be slow or fast, gentle or vigorous, simple or complex.

Ground rules:
Ground rules are read aloud by one of the participants.

Creative exercise 1: Flock Dance
Building on explorations of mirroring, Flock Dance asks participants to create a v shape with their bodies, capturing the formation taken by migratory birds, with one person at the front and other trailing behind in two diagonal lines. A song is selected by the participants, to which the leader performs in improvisatory rhythmic movements. Participants should seek out unification by mimicking the leader's actions. Participants will fall behind when it is the next person's turn to take the lead position until each participant has had their turn.

Group discussion:
This group discussion will build on themes raised around the effects on social media on friendships and romantic relationships.

Discussion prompt:
- How does Instagram impact relationships?

Creative exercise 2: A World Without Instagram
This exercise begins in the same fashion as Instagram vs Reality; the participants form an audience and pick a list of scenarios to explore. Two-three people put themselves forward to perform a particular scenario for the rest of the group. In the first instance, the scenario is performed in the context of a world dominated by Instagram, with the pressure to capture a picture. At some point during the enactment, I will say freeze. One of the

participants will tap someone on the shoulder to leave the scene and it will be performed second time. The second performance is set in the context of a world without Instagram.

Check out:
Participants will be asked to share one key outcome from taking part in the workshop project.

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