

**WALKING WOMAN: HOW CAN WALKING, DRAWING AND WRITING
BE USED TO RECLAIM PUBLIC SPACE; BOTH PHYSICALLY AND
VIRTUALLY?**

By

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DECLARATION

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained in *Walking Woman: Exploring the Flâneuse through Walking, Drawing and Writing in Public Space and Cyberspace* is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification

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ABSTRACT

South African women and queer individuals are continuously fighting for freedom of mobility through forms of activism and protest in order to combat high statistics of gender-based violence. In this thesis, I explore how women and queer individuals use walking, drawing and writing as activist methods in reclaiming space. These methods are seen in the case studies I discuss throughout such as the *Women's March* in 1956 and satellite *Slut Walks*. I positioned my practice-based research through the trope of the *flâneuse*, a fictional urban wanderer who characterises the exclusion of women in public space during the time of modernity. In the context of my thesis, I use the term *flâneuse* as a contemporary figure who embodies the subjectivity of the societal 'other' – women and queer individuals. Through positioning myself as a *flâneuse*, I used this trope as a way of exploring the narratives of the 'other' in public space and used walking, drawing and writing as ways to assert my own intersectional identity in my creative practice.

In this thesis, I investigate the practice of reclaiming public space against the backdrop of apartheid, systems of patriarchy and gender-based violence in South Africa. I began to question the limitations of freedom of mobility and expression in public space itself and looked towards alternative spaces where women and queer individuals are able to assert themselves. With the recent surge of increased internet activity as a result of Covid-19, much of the gender and identity discourse moved towards online spaces. Therefore, I began to expand the scope of my research and started exploring activist methods of walking, drawing and writing within cyberspace. By exploring the dualities of public and cyberspace, along with the concepts and performance of gender in public and private spaces, this thesis aims to investigate how women and queer individuals assert their identity and embody their own gaze while drawing and writing in both public and cyber space. Because my research delves into themes of gender and identity, I positioned my online investigation through *Instagram*. *Instagram*, as a social media platform, provides an alternative cyberspace whereby women and queer individuals are able to claim agency of their intersectional identities in ways that may not be possible in public space itself. Through analysis of narratives found on *Instagram*, I went on digital walks as a data collection method and explored how women and queer individuals would use this online platform as a way of reclaiming space.

Key Words: Public Space, Cyberspace, *Flâneuse*, Post-structural feminism, Cyberfeminism, gender-based violence, walking, drawing, writing, women, queer identity, intersectionality, narrative

OPSOMMING

Vroulike en queer individueë van die Suid Afrikaanse bevolking is in 'n voortdurende geveg vir hul vryheid van beweging - deur middel van aktivisme en protes - en in direkte teenstelling met die hoë statistieke van geslagsgebaseerde geweld. In hierdie tesis ondersoek en vra ek hoe vrouens en queer individueë metodes van aktivisme - naamlik: *stap, teken en skryf* - kan gebruik om gevolglik spasie en plek terug te eien aan hulself. Hierdie metodes word uitgewys in menige bespreekde gevalle studies, byvoorbeeld: "Women's March in 1956" en "Satellite Slut Walks". Ek posisioneer my praktyk-gebaseerde navorsing deur die troop van die "flâneuse" - 'n fiktiewe karakter wie die volgende tyd-spesifieke realiteit vergestalt: die uitsluiting van vrouens in publieke ruimtes in die eeu van Moderniteit. In spesifieke konteks van my tesis, gebruik ek die term "flâneuse" as 'n moderne figuur wie die volgende verteenwoordig: die subjektiwiteit waarmee vrouens en queer individueë as 'ander' hanteer word in die samelewing. Die keuse om myself as "flâneuse" te posisioneer laat my toe om op dié wyse die narratiewe van die 'ander' in publieke ruimtes te ondersoek, en asook, die metodes van *stap, teken en skryf* te gebruik as maniere om my eie interseksionele identiteit te verklaar in my kreatiewe praktyk.

In hierdie tesis ondersoek ek die praktyk van spasie terugvordering teen die afspeling van apartheid, patriargale stelsels en geslagsgebaseerde geweld in Suid Afrika. Ek het in my navorsing die beperking van vryheid van - beweging en uitdrukking begin bevraagteken in publieke ruimte, as geheel, en het gevolglik gesoek vir ruimtes waar vrouens en queer individueë wél die vryheid het om hulself uit te leef. In lyn met die onlangse toename in internet aktiwiteit, as gevolg van Covid-19, het baie van die geslags- en identiteit diskoers begin plaasvind in sosiale ruimtes aanlyn. Dus, het ek die omvang van my navorsing uitgebrei en, gevolglik, het my ondersoek oor metodes van aktivisme, naamlik: *skryf, stap en teken*, uitgebrei om die omvang daarvan in kuberruimte in te sluit. As gevolg van die rede dat my navorsing handel oor temas van geslag en identiteit, posisioneer ek my ondersoek aanlyn deur die beroemde sosiale media platform, *Instagram*. *Instagram* bied 'n alternatiewe kuberruimte waarby vrouens en queer individueë hulself vrylik kan uitdruk en hul interseksionele identiteite kan verklaar in maniere wat nie altyd moontlik is in publieke ruimtes nie. Deur analyses gevind en gevorm op *Instagram*, het ek op digitale wandeling gegaan as 'n metodiek van digitale versameling, en het gevolglik ondersoek ingestel oor die wyse waarop vrouens en queer individueë dié platform kan gebruik as 'n manier om ruimte terug te eien.

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I would also like to thank my family and friends for the endless support, encouraging voice notes and phone calls, coffee dates during study breaks and helping me to believe in myself. Slow and steady wins the race.

Lastly, to all the walking women and queer individuals in South Africa, may your stories live on and may we continue the fight towards safe freedom of mobility and asserting ourselves in public space.

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INTRODUCTION

Public space is idealized as an accessible democratic space where social connections are imaginable and urban life is created (Young 1990). Public space is commonly seen as streets, parks and squares that can be used in an unrestricted manner (Collins & Shantz 2009). However, for many women and queer individuals in South Africa,¹ walking in public space is accompanied with a sense of embodied fear and apprehension. For a nation that is not at war, South Africa has one of the highest recorded statistics of gender-based violence – at least one in every three women is raped in her lifetime (Moffett 2006:1). This is reinforced through societal learning that maintains patriarchal cisheteronormative values and beliefs, which in turn impacts the way women and queer individuals experience the world. Women and queer individuals continue to be subjected to inequality and scrutiny in public, as well as cyberspace. This is seen not only within South Africa, but within a broader, global context. This research problem is a response to the gendered experiences within public space and cyberspace. In this thesis, public and cyberspace is explored in relation to women and queer individuals through practice-based research that investigates methods in reclaiming these spaces.

Janet Wolff's iconic essay: *The invisible flâneuse: Women and the literature of modernity* (1985) analyses the exclusion of women in public space during the time of modernity.² My positionality as a queer woman of colour addresses this exclusion by using the *flâneuse* as both a theory and method of exploring public and cyberspace.³ As a queer woman of colour, I have experienced the insecurities and precarities due to the socio-political history and structures of South Africa. As gender-based violence protests were held in South Africa, I was inspired by the collective movement and activism in reclaiming space. As women and queer individuals walked through public space to assert their freedom of movement, I was confronted with my own intersectional identity and participated in gender discourse as a way to understand my position in society.⁴ With my identity sketched against the legacy of apartheid, I have experienced the tensions of race and gender that manifests in public and cyberspace. Hence, my creative

¹ The term queer acts as an umbrella concept that encapsulates non-cisheterosexual identities (Levy & Johnson, 2011). Within the scope of my research, I use the phrase 'queer identities' to describe individuals who belong to the LGBTQIA+ community. The term LGBTQIA+ is a community that stands for (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and encompasses other sexual orientations and gender identities that span beyond this spectrum).

² The time of modernity refers to a set of economic and political attitudes and practices that surpassed ideas of tradition; advancing society into a modern way of thinking and being (Baudrillard 1987).

³ The term *flâneuse* is referred to as the female counterpart of the modern male *flâneur*, as a figure who walks and wanders in public space. Conceptualized by Janet Wolff, the *flâneuse* challenges the exclusion of women in public space through female subjectivity and presence in public space.

⁴ Intersectionality denotes the different ways in which race, class, and gender intersect that informs the numerous facets of a person's identity and how they are perceived in society (Crenshaw 1991).

practice explores how myself, and other women and queer individuals, reclaim space through the lens of the *flâneuse*.

Covid-19 restricted the general public's movements as a way of preventing the virus' spread. As a result, the public became confined to their homes, working conditions became remote, social distancing became mandatory, and communication between people became increasingly mediated online. During this time, protests and gender discourse transcended from the public space, and proliferated online, where women and queer individuals expressed themselves through walking, drawing and writing. In this practice-based research, public and cyberspace is explored through walking, drawing and writing through the trope of the *flâneuse*.

The creative practice that I engage in, as both the researcher and as a *flâneuse*, is explored using theoretical frameworks of post-structural feminism aided by Judith Butler. Butler unpacks ideas of gender performativity and identity politics which informs the conception of gendered space in my practice-based research. Cyberfeminism, as a second theoretical framework in my research, is investigated through Donna Haraway's (1991) conception of the cyborg and women's relationship with their identity and the internet. Because I am gathering stories of the experience of gendered space, narrative inquiry as methodology is examined through case studies of women and queer individuals in public and cyberspace. Throughout this thesis, I discuss how patriarchal ideologies dictate the ways in which public and cyberspace is experienced, therefore post-structural feminism and cyberfeminism are theoretical frameworks through which women and queer individuals can liberate themselves. Throughout my research, I discuss the narratives of women and queer individuals who have reclaimed space through walking, drawing and writing. These case studies will be in conversation with my own body of work that I produce through walking, drawing and writing as a *flâneuse*. Approaches of layering, overwriting and distortion are used in my creative practice when I walk, draw and write in public and cyberspace.

Research Question

This research question formed while looking for methods in reclaiming public and cyberspace through the lens of the *flâneuse*. My primary site of investigation is walking in public space within the context of South Africa, and specifically, Stellenbosch. Foregrounded by gender-based violence in public space, I look towards the history of public space in relation to patriarchal ideologies that prohibit women and queer individuals from moving freely. Through positioning myself as a *flâneuse* in my practice-based research, I explore how walking, drawing

and writing can be used as methods in reclaiming space. As a queer woman of colour, I have experienced the complexities of my gender and identity in public space. Because of this, and as a result of Covid-19 that restricts space mobility, women and queer individuals are looking towards alternative spaces in order to express themselves and assert their identity. Through my research, I explore how cyberspace becomes an alternative space through which myself, women, and queer individuals practice methods in reclaiming space. Therefore, I also explore the relationship between gender, identity and cyberspace through methods of walking, drawing and writing online.

The research question is as follows:

How can walking, drawing and writing be used to reclaim public space; both physically and virtually?

Aims and Objectives

The study will focus on the relationship between public and cyberspace and will analyse how women and queer individuals reclaim space and assert their identities through walking, drawing and writing practices – in both the physical world and the virtual world. In the beginning of Covid-19, my creative practice of walking, drawing and writing in public space was interrupted. Because of the restriction of the public's mobility, public space was increasingly negotiated through cyberspace. To this end, the concept of taking digital walks and cyber journaling as a form of exploration materialised in this practice-based research.

My research aims to reclaim public space through methods of walking, drawing and writing through the lens of the *flâneuse*.

- The objective will be to contextualise the history of public space in South Africa in relation to its socio-political histories and structures. This will be achieved through investigating gender-based violence, space mobility, and women walking as methods of protest and activism. These themes are translated in my creative practice through the visual journal I use while walking in public space. In this journal, I draw and write in public space, as a way of asserting my identity; describing both the personal and collective struggles of being a woman in public space within South Africa.

This thesis aims to compare the modernist approach of the *flâneur* with the contemporaneity of the *flâneuse* that highlights the different modes of walking.

- The objective of this aim is to problematise the male trope of the *flâneur* from a post-structural feminist, and queer perspective, and negotiate the *flâneuse* in public space. This will be achieved through collecting stories of women walking in public space as protest and layering these narratives with my own creative practice as a *flâneuse* wandering through public space.

When investigating cyberspace, this research aims to analyse how women and queer individuals reclaim their identity through the use of social media platforms, with *Instagram* as a site of investigation.

- The objective of this aim will be achieved by taking digital strolls through *Instagram* as a data collection method. The narratives of women and queer individuals in cyberspace will serve as discussion points in relation my own practice that responds to these narratives through methods of layering, overwriting and distortion through mixed-media drawings and digital art pieces.

Theoretical Framework

Post-structural feminism produces new ideas that help feminists re-evaluate previous suppositions about issues like performativity, politics, subjectivity and language (Davies & Gannon 2015). Post-structural feminism aims to make binaries visible in the categories we know of as male and female. From these terms, we begin to analyse the power of language when ascribing identity and gender. Post-structural feminism seeks to look past social privilege for individuals who are heroic, powerful, and successful and instead investigates the possibility of forming a new type of agency. In *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* (1990), Judith Butler meticulously explains the philosophical foundations of queer theory, with an emphasis on combining post-structural feminism into a larger study of the development of gender identity to differentiate between sex and gender. In this text, Butler argues that gender is not an intrinsic, biologically defined attribute or innate personality, but is consistently dependent on, and enforced by social norms. This repetitive performance of gender relates to my research, as I explore how women and queer individuals embrace and break away from social norms in order to reclaim space in public and cyberspace.

Cyberfeminism marks a new relationship between feminism and technology. The movement is a reaction to the 1980s pessimistic feminist views where technology and machinery were perceived as patriarchal and masculine. In *Zeroes + ones: Digital women and the new technoculture* (1997), leading theorist Sadie Plant discusses how cyberfeminism emphasizes

a women's subjectivity, agency, and pleasures inherent in digital technologies. Cyberfeminism has a relationship with online activism that promotes agency of women and queer bodies, their identities, and intersectional stances. Cyberfeminists such as Donna Haraway, in her seminal text *Simians, cyborgs and women: The reinvention of nature* (1991), conceives cyberspaces as essentially liberating, theorizing their desire to transition beyond conventional limitations and binaries of popular gender and feminist thought in the early 90s. Spaces on the internet and in technology are imagined as having the capacity to facilitate a “post-gender world” (Haraway 1991:150). Using cyberfeminism as a theoretical lens to navigate my research, asserts a new positionality for women and queer individuals who participate in the virtual world.

Theorists such as Judith Butler (1990) analyse gender construction from a post-structural feminist perspective. In this sense, we begin to see a social reality that transcends binaries, especially online, where communities of women and queer bodies have formed. From this point, the relationship between post-structural feminism and cyberfeminism becomes evident. Using these theoretical frameworks becomes a potential tool for societal transformation. In this thesis, I argue that cyberfeminism, and creative practices within cyberspace, have the potential to transform society in ways that the public space cannot. Through post-structural feminism, the subject goes through a discursive process and gains “a sense of oneself” (Davies 1991:51). This process in turn generates new meaning of identity through continual discourse. These continual discourses are seen on platforms such as *Instagram*, a space wherein women and queer individuals can assert and reclaim their identities.

Methodology

The experiences of women and queer bodies in public and cyberspace, are analysed through narrative inquiry as my chosen methodology in this qualitative practice-based research. Narrative inquiry can be described as “a distinct form of discourse,” and as “retrospective meaning making—the shaping or ordering of past experience ... a way of understanding one’s own and others’ actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time” (Chase 2005:656). By concentrating on narrative, we can examine not only how stories are constructed, and how they function, but also who creates them and by what means; the processes of how they are consumed; and how some narratives are suppressed, disputed or accepted (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou 2008).

A narrative inquiry methodology takes different layers of meaning and experience, sometimes contradictory, and creates a dialogue with one another, embodying a discursive practice. This

methodology takes an approach that encompasses multiplicity, which in turn produces unexpected connections and meanings. A narrative inquiry methodology becomes a generative force that opens up new pathways and creates new ways of seeing ourselves. Through methods such as layering, overwriting, and distortion, my creative practice in public and cyberspace will be achieved through walking, drawing and writing. I will analyse how these methods are layered with one another when performed in both public and cyberspace; revealing their points of difference and similarities between these two spaces in relation to identity.

Through my own practice of walking, drawing and writing as a *flâneuse*, I aim to see how other women and queer individuals use walking, drawing and writing as methods to reclaim their identities. The process of the data collection in this research includes "...case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts — that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives" (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:2). The range of data will include stories collected from *Instagram* through virtual walks as the *flâneuse*.

With specific focus on social media platforms in cyberspace, *Instagram* serves as the secondary site of investigation in this study. In my research I use the concept of the virtual *flâneuse*, as a way to explore the eternal traversing loop between women and queer individuals online and in public space. This area of research is relevant because of the pervasive nature of social media in contemporary society and its influence on how identity is performed. *Instagram* serves as a platform that allows societally oppressed identities to express themselves and reclaim their space online. Through my creative practice of walking, drawing and writing, the narratives of women and queer individuals will be overwritten, layered and distorted with my own personal experiences and observations made in public and cyberspace.

When gathering data in cyberspace, purposive sampling used as a method for data collection.⁵ The data discussed are posts from *Instagram* written by women and queer individuals. This multi-modal social media platform enables people to learn about social issues and has the potential to engage with the public in efficient and meaningful ways. The data and narratives gathered from this research informs the artistic practice I engage in, through a process of walking, drawing and writing as a *flâneuse*, in order to reclaim identity in public and cyberspace.

⁵ The purposive sampling technique is used by qualitative researchers who consciously chooses or finds participants or data whose attributes are appropriate for the study. The researcher determines the type, or form of knowledge that needs to be known and locates individuals who are able to give the information on the basis of their experience or expertise (Etikan *et al.*, 2016).

Literature Review

In *The Production of Space* (1991), sociologist Henri Lefebvre theorises that the concept of space is socially constructed and is based on shared ideals and socially-produced meaning. According to Lefebvre (1991:26), socially produced space acts “as a tool of thought and action”, functioning as a mode of production as well as “a means of control, and hence dominance, of power”. From this, society’s spatial perception and practice is determined (1991:22). The creation of new spaces may be critical in deconstructing oppressive power relations in embedded ideologies. Lefebvre contends that “new social relations demand new space” (1991:59) and later develops the concept of differential space in order to establish new, diverse connections. Lefebvre’s work is relevant to my own research in that it maintains that the social space of South Africa serves as a means of imposing patriarchal structures on women and queer individuals through systems of power, which in effect, inhibits freedom of mobility.

Janet Wolff’s iconic text, *The invisible flâneuse: women and the literature of modernity* (1985), is one of the first academic texts to explore the notion of a *flâneuse* — a female urban wanderer. The term *flâneuse* is a neologism that derives from the term *flâneur*. Wolff (1985:37) argues that modernist accounts were written by men, and the experiences of women were invisible, making the possibility of a *flâneuse* during this time invisible. In this sense, the freedom of movement granted for a *flâneur* is not actualized for a *flâneuse*. This is important to note when comparing the experiences that women and queer individuals have in post-apartheid South Africa, where freedom of mobility for these identities is impeded.

When speaking of cyberspace from a post-structural and feminist perspective, it is important to note the key influencers of what we now know now as cyberfeminism. Donna Haraway’s essay, *A cyborg manifesto: science, technology, and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century* (1991), is the foundation and origin of cyberfeminism. When she called for a rejection of strict distinctions between humans and animals, Haraway’s theories were progressive and claimed that the cyborg is “a creature in a post-gender world” (Haraway 1991:150). Haraway analyses how technology reconstructs the boundaries of identity as our physical bodies become less relevant, and a chance to challenge how the concept of identity develops within this framework.

Glitch Feminism (2020) written by Legacy Russell, illustrates an important new era in cyberfeminism which delves into the connections between gender, technology, and identity. The book is written in a manifesto style that reads as part media theory and part memoir. *Glitch Feminism* (2020) provides case studies of queer and people of colour whose practice in

cyberspace realises the potential of the internet as a liberating space for marginalised identities. In this book, Russell writes that there is no distinction between our virtual and material selves. There is only a distinction of ourselves AFK (Away From Keyboard) as we are "...suspended between on- and offline, eternally traversing this loop" (Russell 2020:73), therefore we are either 'online', or 'offline'. This book builds on theories of cyberfeminism, through contemporary examples that relates to my own research in finding stories that describe how women and queer individuals represent their identity.

In building on the theme of identity in cyberspace, Post-structural feminism poses itself as a fitting theoretical framework. It links to cyberfeminism's concerns of binary identities and focuses on the possibilities of transcending our current attitude and belief systems that are widely accepted and understood. These attitudes and belief systems form part of grand narratives that should be re-evaluated to achieve positive social change in our contemporary society where division is evident. Judith Butler's text, *Gender trouble and the subversion of identity* (1990), expands on these points. Post-structural research does not look at the differences between binary categories but multiplies how we think of categories such as male and female; to play with the idea that subjectivities are both and neither and understand that power is constructed by systems that are spatially located.

Butler writes that identity is not a fixed attribute defining the terms 'man' or 'woman'; rather these attributes are constructed through consistent gender structures (1990:24). Through her writing, Butler aims to reveal gender identity as a "stylized repetition of acts through time" (1990:192). Butler asserts that identity is performed through these repetitive acts. "If gender is established in multiple ways, then it can be disrupted in multiple ways...such disruptions...will reveal the contingency of gendered identity and hence its vulnerability" (Hekman 2000:292). Post-structural feminism serves as a tool of disruption, as it deconstructs our understanding of language and binaries in relation to gender and identity. In my own research, my method of 'disruption' uses the term *flâneuse* as a way of reclaiming space that asserts women's' and queer individuals' subjectivity in public and cyberspace.

Chapter Outline

The structure of this practice-based research is done in three chapters. Chapter One provides a contextual overview that investigates mobility in public space, namely within South Africa as a whole, with my own creative practice situated in the town of Stellenbosch. In this chapter, the idea of walking as a form of activism and protest is introduced. These themes are introduced in relation to case studies of how women and queer individuals have challenged patriarchal

ideologies and reclaimed public space. In Chapter Two, I broaden my scope of gender and space mobility and look at contemporary walking, drawing and writing practices through the lens of the *flâneuse*. In Chapter Three, I delve into cyberspace and how gender is experienced online through platforms such as *Instagram*. I continue to analyse walking, drawing and writing as methods of reclaiming space online. The narratives and case studies of how other women and queer individuals have situated themselves online informs my creative practice in the third chapter. The methods of walking, drawing and writing are not split between chapters, but incorporated throughout when discussing my own creative practice and the narratives of women and queer individuals.

Chapter One discusses space mobility of women and queer individuals in public space through the theme of walking as a queer woman living in Stellenbosch. In this chapter, the socio-political history of Stellenbosch is unpacked against the South African perspective of apartheid and patriarchal ideologies set in binary thinking. The effects of apartheid and patriarchy have transformed into an environment whereby women and queer individuals cannot move freely or safely through public space. Gender-based violence and my own experience of public space informs the creative process within this chapter. Themes of walking are examined with case studies of how women and queer individuals have reclaimed public space through walking as a form of activism. In addition to these case studies, my own practice-based research within public space is explored through drawings and writing from my visual journal. In this journal, I document a vigil held in Stellenbosch, putting ideas of walking as a form of protest and activism, into motion.

Chapter Two builds on the previous chapter's ideas of space mobility through discussing the concept of the *flâneur* contested by the possibility of the *flâneuse* as a way of reclaiming space. Comparing the modernist approach of the *flâneur* with the contemporaneity of the *flâneuse* will highlight the ways in which gender and identity is performed in public space. The trope of the *flâneur* in public space is analysed from a patriarchal perspective. This perspective is contrasted and problematised with the possibility of a *flâneuse*, as negotiated from a post-structural feminist and queer perspective. Case studies that investigate how women and queer identities have reclaimed public space through practices of walking, drawing and writing are reviewed in this chapter. These examples are layered with my own creative practice of walking, drawing and writing as a *flâneuse*.

Chapter Three highlights my method of exploration as a *flâneuse* in cyberspace through walking, drawing, and writing online. The idea of walking online is informed by Catherine Russell's (2002) conception of the *flâneuse* as cyberfeminist. Contextualized through the

theoretical frameworks of post-structural feminism and cyberfeminism, this chapter explores themes of reclaiming space through narratives of women and queer individuals online. These narratives focus on the experience of being a woman and/or queer individual on social media platforms such as *Instagram*. This chapter investigates the differences between public space and cyberspace and argues that *Instagram* serves as a platform that allows oppressed identities to reclaim and create their own spaces online; in ways that the public space inhibits. Drawing inspiration from the themes and narratives found on social media posts, this chapter explores my own creative practice that engages with the process of overwriting, layering and distortion in my works. Themes of selfies, self-representation and activist platforms are discussed as ways in which identity is performed and reclaimed online. Through case studies, I analyse how women and queer individuals assert their identity on *Instagram* through which reclaiming space in cyberspace realised.

CHAPTER ONE: WALKING, GENDER AND IDENTITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

This chapter addresses public space within South Africa through the history of apartheid and its socio-political aspects of racial segregation and gender. I analyse space mobility against the South African perspective of apartheid and patriarchal ideologies. Following an overview of public space in South Africa, I situate this practice-based research in Stellenbosch. Here, I focus on how patriarchal ideologies manifest in contemporary society and the effects this has on women and queer individuals walking in public space. Themes of walking are examined through gender-based violence and my own experience as a queer woman of colour in public space. Through case studies, I consider how women and queer individuals reclaim public space through walking as a form of protest and activism. Together with these case studies, drawings and writing from my visual journal are used in my practice-based research in public space within Stellenbosch. In this journal, I record gender-based violence discussions and a vigil held in Stellenbosch, where thoughts of walking as a form of protest and activism is demonstrated as a way of reclaiming public space.

Public space in South Africa

Theoretically, public space can be understood as the space where 'the public' is shaped and where social and cultural laws that regulate public conduct, predominate (Mitchell & Staeheli 2009). For Young (1999), public space and urban life are distinguished by spaces where social differences can be experienced without segregation, a diversity that encourages people to venture out of their homes, to spaces that are available to everyone. However, this perspective is idealistic and the reality of being in public space differs from these definitions.

Equitable access to public space remains a contested issue and is perhaps best illustrated by the reality of the apartheid regime that prevented people of colour from moving freely. Partly due to the legacy of apartheid, the act of walking and the relationship with public space in South Africa is complex and multi-layered. People of colour — whether indigenous, newly relocated, or part of subaltern communities whose ancestral homes were first destroyed by the colonial powers that constructed the city — were often prohibited from walking in certain areas or from engaging fully in public space. These people were criminalized in public or harassed and obstructed by their lack of fundamental human rights. These racial barriers are embedded in the legislation that is now amended, yet they exist in activities such as 'stop and search,' which find representation in almost every colonial position and are overwhelmingly applied to people of colour, often with tragic consequences (Solnit 2001). The use of 'race' as

a foundation for discrimination has left significant social, economic, and political wounds in the country. Racism in South Africa is a contested subject and its effects are prevalent in many public spaces.

In a nation like South Africa, LGBTQIA+ experiences are exacerbated even more by the way in which the state has spatially regulated different communities throughout history.⁶ As a result, the way colonial and patriarchal apartheid systems compartmentalized, controlled, and manipulated groups has had a lasting impact on queer communities today (Tucker 2009). Pumla Dineo Gqola discusses how socially acceptable sexism continues to foster fear of violence among women and lesbians in heteropatriarchal societies such as South Africa and describes the social landscape as a 'fear factory' (2015:78). The lasting impact of this fear can be seen in instances of 'corrective rape', where queer subjects are raped with the objective of 'correcting' their sexual orientation in order to make them heterosexual (Thomas 2013). Through this, the idea of gendered space continues to proliferate, which impedes the freedom of mobility for women and queer individuals in South Africa.

Public space in South Africa was, if possible, a place to be avoided, especially for the first few years after the first democratic election in 1994, due to high crime rates and urban decay. The crime rate in South Africa has escalated since, partly because, despite our nation having achieved democratic freedom, it did not achieve the socioeconomic freedom needed for all classes and races to reach a sense of equality (Paasche 2012). This tension continues to hamper justice and social inclusion and is seen in the ways that many men treat women and/or queer individuals in South Africa, which influences the effects of gender-based violence in our country (Mona & Canty 2017). This point is highlighted in the following quote:

In contemporary era, South African men groomed by a culture of violence and protected by a culture of secrecy use rape as a weapon on control and attempt to assert their masculine identity by exercising power and dominance through physical and sexual violence against women. Men who are discontented due to lack of access to economic opportunities and frustrated by being unable to fulfil their perceived role as

⁶ The term LGBTQIA+ is a community that stands for (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and encompasses other sexual orientations and gender identities that span beyond this spectrum). In this research, I use the terms 'queer identities' as an umbrella term to encapsulate orientations of LGBTQIA+ community.

breadwinners in the household, turn to crime as a coping mechanism and violence against women as an assertion of power (Mona & Canty 2017:23).

The South African urban landscape remains fractured, paralleling the colonial segregationist order of the apartheid regime (Paasche 2012:46). Apartheid-era practices persist in various ways, and the battle for the 'right to the city,' to reference Henri Lefebvre's (1968) phrase, continues largely unabated. This can be seen in our country's current position, where social division and the lack of socioeconomic equality is still evident. It is not only the segregation of races and classes that is endemic to South Africa, but the segregation of genders too. South Africa's conservative and heteronormative society restricts women's and queer individuals' sexuality and freedom of mobility. Gqola asserts:

The threat of rape is an effective way to remind women that they are not safe and that their bodies are not entirely theirs. It is an exercise in power that communicates that the man creating fear has power over the woman who is the target of his attention; it also teaches women who witness it about their vulnerability either through reminding them of their own previous fear or showing them that it could happen to them next. It is an effective way to keep women in check and often results in women curtailing their movement in a physical and psychological manner (Gqola 2015:79).

South African society (and this extends to all 'races' and classes to different degrees) is historically patriarchal. Because of this, men have typically been granted a sense of mobility on account of their gender and positioning in society. Men have always had authority in our society, while women have for the most part been treated as socially, politically and physically subordinate. A women's position was domestic — it involved child rearing and caring for the well-being, cooking, cleaning and care of the household (South African History Online 2011). Restricting women to the private space is a means of preventing them from engaging in public life and is therefore an act of political and social dominance and a deprivation of freedom. Whether this confinement is imposed by legal or social systems, the effect is the same (Monem 2020).

Black domesticity was established in South Africa at the turn of colonisation. During this time, women, and specifically black women, were bound to the private space of the home. As a result of this, domestic work in white homes influenced the entrance of black women into public space within South Africa (Baderoon 2014:173). With the emergence of South Africa's modern economy, the development of cities, urban-rural areas, growth of the migrant labour system, and lastly, the success of the Women's March in 1956, women were slowly allowed to move

from the private sphere into public space (South African History Online 2011). However, regardless of the freedom of mobility that is finally given to women, they still do not experience public space in the same ways that men do (Dreyer & McDowall 2012).

Along with women whose space mobility is impacted, queer individuals continue the struggle towards equitable access into public space. Towards the end of 2006, queer South Africans celebrated a victory in the legislation and same-sex couples were granted the permission to legally marry. The legalisation of same-sex marriage has bolstered South Africa's status as one of the continent's most progressive countries. Same-sex marriage has been held up as one of the most powerful pieces of evidence of South Africa's progress away from its intolerant past; a history that is now more identified with opponents of same-sex marriage than with the country's present government (Tucker 2009). The queer geography of South Africa therefore "acts as a barometer test for measuring South Africa's socio-political climate and the extent of post-1994 transformation" (Müller 2019:1614). Although South Africa's accomplishment in this respect should not be overlooked, and while some aspects of post-apartheid transformation is commendable, the legal rights won since 2006 do not necessarily correspond to daily improvements in the lives of many queer individuals in South Africa.

South Africa is in a complex situation where women and queer individuals are constitutionally empowered and yet, in public as well as private spaces, they do not feel safe. Truly empowered women and queer individuals should not exist in their houses, minds, and psyches with the haunting terror of gender-based violence and other aggressive intrusions (Gqola 2015:116). In efforts to fix the overburdened and fraught criminal justice system, perpetrators of gender-based violence appear to face injustice and inefficiency at the hands of the judiciary and police daily. The simple act of walking in public space is imposed with various degrees of gender-based violence, which manifests in countless forms, from street harassment, catcalling and sexual assault, to life-threatening instances of rape and murder (Müller 2019:1610).

Walking in public space in Stellenbosch

The act of walking can be subversive and the identity of the person moving through a space changes the meaning and relationship of that particular body in that particular space. Tim Creswell (2006:197), a geographer, notes that "...ways of moving have quite specific characteristics depending on who is moving and the social and cultural space that is being moved through". As a queer woman of colour, this point resonates strongly with me, as my sense of self was developed in a space where my identity, historically, is not welcomed. In my

practice-based research, Stellenbosch serves as the site of investigation when analysing public space. Stellenbosch has been my home for the past seven years during tertiary studies and it was in this space where I became aware of my identity. Walking as a queer woman of colour in this highly politicised space is a transgressive act that liberates me as I assert my identity through my practice-based research.

Before engaging in this research, I would not think twice about the privilege of walking. Sometimes walking is not anything at all, but an easy, almost unconscious activity that is so important to humankind that it often functions as the concept of what it means to be human first and foremost (Monem 2020). During my studies in Stellenbosch, I began to walk to escape and explore. I walked to observe and appreciate the lush greenery of the landscape; flora and fauna unfamiliar to me, as I grew up in the dry heat of a desert environment. Lauren Elkin (2016:39) says that “Walking is mapping with your feet. It helps you piece a city together.” Elkin (2016) describes walking as an act that helps her feel at home. She says that “There’s a small pleasure in seeing how well I’ve come to know the city through my wanderings on foot” (Elkin 2016:39).

Walking can be a therapeutic act of pure exploration. The history of walking through the city is a narrative of defiance and submission, of dreaming and creating, of defining and being (Monem 2020). Through walking as a queer woman of colour, my body overwrites these spaces; the spaces my ancestors and family were historically not allowed to walk in. Overwriting can be viewed as a performance that deconstructs a space and is restructured according to the perspective and reality of the person who overwrites. The practice of overwriting binds the politicized events of the past to the present moment. As a queer woman of colour moving through these spaces, overwriting and walking are ways that I can reclaim space.

The material landscape of Stellenbosch University is constructed by colonialism and the apartheid regime.⁷ Through my practice, I challenge the historical identity of Stellenbosch with my brown legs becoming monolithic forms that crash down onto the cemented pavements that historically, once only welcomed the footsteps of white men. From a personal perspective, walking allows me to escape any feelings of inferiority I have in a white-washed space, as my

⁷ The town of Stellenbosch was established in 1679 by the commander of the Dutch East India Company, Simon van der Stel. Stellenbosch is the second oldest colonial settlement in South Africa with a history of slavery and complex racial and socio-political issues. Stellenbosch University itself had a large role to play in the development of Afrikaner nationalism in the twentieth century, which was intrinsically tied to the establishment of apartheid ideology. As the university grew, it acquired land that was previously home to people of colour, who were forcibly removed under apartheid’s Group Areas Act between 1940-1970 (South African History Online, 2019).

skin is one of the few shades of brown I sometimes see on Stellenbosch's campus. This connects the long history of racialized spaces in South Africa to the present moment, repeating the experience and feelings of exclusion people of colour might have felt at the time of apartheid.

Walking is always positioned as an act that situates itself within the context of the body that is walking. Therefore, walking means different things according to the body that walks and walking as a woman is a contested act. During my undergraduate studies from 2014, walking as a woman in Stellenbosch became more unsafe. Young women, just like myself, would fall victim of the acts of gender-based violence. It is in this place where I finally began to understand the terms that I did not know as a child – catcalling, street harassment and rape. I remember the naivety of walking home alone at night from bars, before I realised the necessity of pepper spray, a rape whistle or an *Uber*.⁸ I remember a time when *WhatsApp* messages would flood our university residence group chats, with warnings of cars that would grab girls from sidewalks.⁹ I remember my friends and I starting to feel more unsafe than ever, and the independent act of walking alone was replaced with walking in groups to avoid 'stranger danger'. I remember more and more cases of young women being assaulted and catcalled in public spaces. I remember attending a night vigil in 2017, where hundreds of students gathered in solidarity for the student who was raped and held at gun-point on a bench less than ten meters outside of a university residence. It was at this time, very early in my undergraduate studies, that I began to fear walking freely in public space.

This fear is illustrated in Figure 1, where the idea of moving through public space as a queer woman is represented through quick pen strokes and distorted figures on-the-go, where going home as quickly and safely as possible became a regular practice. These drawings were made in my visual journal as I walked through the streets of Stellenbosch, engaging with my practice-based research on foot. The use of visual journals may give more accurate depictions of the cultural context in which they were developed than their written equivalents. Journals can be thought of as a place where reflections are recorded, observations are documented, where internal maps are created, and playful meanderings are realised (New 2005). Through these journals, I translate my feelings of uncertainty through drawing as I assert my identity in public space. My visual journal becomes a performative tool through which I interrupt the precarious feelings of fear I usually feel when walking alone in public space. When using my visual journal,

⁸ *Uber* is a popular transportation application that focuses on ride-sharing. In the context of my research, *Uber* became a way for women and minority bodies to travel from locations safely, to avoid dangers in public space.

⁹ *WhatsApp* is a messaging service that allows its users to send instant text and voice messages to individuals or groups, and shares documents, images and live locations.

my body as a queer woman is no longer rendered as an object of the male gaze, but actively subverts this gaze, as I assert my own observations and recordings of my internal and external environment. The use of portable materials such as a journal, pen, and ink, echoes the idea of mobility though being easily accessible and transported from place to place. These tools become ways in which I can reclaim my identity through the creative practices of walking and drawing.



Fig 1: Escaping the dangers of Public Space, 2020. Pen and ink on paper. Mikhaila Coerecius

In 2019, discussions of gender-based violence and freedom of mobility increased after a horrific incident claimed the life of a nineteen-year old student, Uyinene Mrwetyana. Uyinene was raped and murdered by a man named Luyanda Botha, who confessed to his crime (The New Yorker 2019). The case of this young woman was one of hundreds of cases that highlights the problem of gender-based violence in South Africa. Many South African citizens stood in solidarity as the campaign named *Am I Next?* was formed. United protestors held regular protests in public space as well as in and cyberspace through social media platforms, calling on the government to take effective measures in combating the high statistics of gender-based

violence in South Africa. Concerned citizens continued to question South Africa's extremely high statistics of gender-based violence.¹⁰



Fig 2: Am I Ne(X)t?, 2020. Pen and ink on paper. Mikhaila Coerecius

South Africa's high statistics of gender-based violence is depicted in an infographic drawing in Figure 2. As I walked through the streets of Stellenbosch, I drew target symbols as a tally for every woman who passed me. With every 'X' that was etched on my paper, I imagined that any of these women could fall victim to gender-based violence. As the swarm of women who passed me became a blur, the X's I drew were followed by a quicker pace, becoming illegible closer to the bottom of the page. Through this drawing in my visual journal, I challenge the unending battle that has become so prevalent, that the right to equitable access into public space becomes a blurred and unimagined reality. The question, 'Am I next?' illustrates the inherent fear of becoming yet another statistic at the hands of gender-based violence and the

¹⁰ An article on Bloomberg's website (2019) states, "A woman is murdered every three hours in South Africa, and more than 40,000 rapes are reported every year, police data shows. The national murder rate of 35.2 per 100,000 people is more than six times higher than the U.S."

possibility of being raped and murdered in South Africa simply for being a woman or queer individual.

In 2019, students and staff members held a vigil for all the women and girls who lost their lives during *Women's Month* due to gender-based violence. This vigil became a turning point for my research and I engaged in a process of live drawing as a method of documenting the event.¹¹ Walking and drawing are sensory engagements, and when done in public space, an emotive response can be evoked. According to Ross Smith (2016), live drawing is able to evoke abstract thinking and sensory experiences. It is a transformative exercise that changes the way we think about image-making, drawing, the representation of concepts, and provides alternatives to how we visually organise ideas.



Fig 3: Live drawings from visual journal, 2019. Ink on paper. Mikhaila Coerecius

It was during this vigil where themes of walking became a defying act in reclaiming space in my practice-based research. The act of walking together is so surprisingly subversive, and is so fundamental to freedom and democracy, that the freedom to go outdoors, access public space, or to congregate in crowds, is always the first act to be denied in periods of severe constitutional rupture or under rule from an oppressive government (Solnit 2014). The vigil was

¹¹ When speaking of live drawing, I refer to a performative process that involves the body drawing in a dynamic space, outside of a traditional studio environment.

an act of resistance and defiance in wanting women and queer voices to be heard. In Figure 3 and 4, the removal of external visual representation shifts the attention of the artist to their inner visions and imagination. Figure 3 and Figure 4 express these ideas through abstract forms that can still be read as a crowd of people moving and hands holding protest signs represented as rough shapes of rectangles and squares. The absence of pure representative figures and perfectionism in these drawings instead indicates the emotions I felt at this time as I felt the heat and energy of people walking together for a unified cause, relating to moments in history where walking is used as a form of activism and resistance in opposing a patriarchal society.



Fig 4: Live drawings from visual journal, 2019. Ink on paper. Mikhaila Coerecius

Despite progress, gender inequality persists in our daily lives. In South Africa, our rights are governed by a constitution that forms the foundation for a better society. However, the fact is that many women, queer and minority bodies as well as children, still lack the freedom to move freely. Our society either remains silent, or our outraged cries are deafened by the fragmented perspectives against gender-based violence in our communities. Women, along with minority bodies such as queer, trans individuals and women of colour, continue to be subjected by gender norms.

Walking as an act of protest and resistance

If a necessary condition for walking in the city is freedom of mobility, we need to critically analyse how power is enacted in public space. Figure 5 further demonstrates this point with the caption: “Street harassment coincides with the decline of women’s mobility”. The power enacted in public space through street harassment and gender-based violence prohibits women and queer bodies’ mobility and equitable access to public space.



Fig 5: A lack of freedom of mobility, 2020. Acrylic paint and ink on paper. Mikhaila Coerecius

An online survey on *Instagram* hosted by @girlsagainstoppression (2020) asked: “SA womxn what would you do if men didn’t exist for 24h?”¹² Most women responded that they would take a walk, especially alone at night. Other responses ranged from wanting freedom, autonomy

over which clothes they felt they could wear in public, to wanting political and systematic action to take place against gender-based violence, and to not live with fear and feel unsafe (@girlsagainstoppression August 2020). This sense of fear I speak of restricts women from feeling as though they can safely move through public spaces (Logan 2015), which pressures women to “negotiate the terms and conditions upon which they may enter these spheres” (Laniya 2005:107). The terms and conditions whereby these spaces are negotiated is seen in the fact that before stepping out of the door, many women already anticipate the possibility of being looked at, whether this may or may not happen. They plan – from their clothes, to their route, where they walk, and what time they expect to be indoors before nightfall.

In many gender-based violence debates, I hear phrases echo: “They asked for it,” “That happened because of what they were wearing,” or “Why did they walk alone? They know it’s unsafe.” However, in discussions recently held in the media, women and queer individuals no longer tolerate the long-standing justifications of victim-shaming.¹³ The concept of victim-shaming was put into question when a statement from a representative of the Toronto Police publicly said: “...women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized” (The Guardian 2011). This becomes a glaring indication of the way the occupancy of space remains gendered. In response to this patriarchal ideology, a group of women in Toronto founded the ‘Slut Walk,’ and soon satellite Slut Walks followed and were held in New Zealand, Canada, America, Australia, Europe, Mexico and in Stellenbosch.¹⁴

Figure 6 is a photograph taken of the Slut Walk that was held in Stellenbosch where students occupied the streets with protest signs questioning why their bodies should be policed and a call to end rape culture. Although the Slut Walk movement itself was received with criticism, it is evident that women and queer individuals are finding empowering ways to challenge the oppressive forces of a patriarchal society that infringes on their freedom and mobility.¹⁵ Therefore, walking as a method for activism and protest becomes a way in which to situate one’s identity in the very space that inhibits these bodies to exist and move through public space safely.

¹³ Victim-shaming, also known as victim blaming, is a way of casting entire or partial blame on a victim of a transgression or crime. This mitigates the inherent prejudices held towards the social standing of the said victim in that they were blameworthy for the actions of their perpetrators.

¹⁴ See Reger, *The Story of a Slut Walk: Sexuality, Race, and Generational Divisions in Contemporary Feminist Activism* (2014).

¹⁵ The Slut Walk received two central critiques and feminists were challenged with embracing a new, passionate mobilisation whilst grappling with the ideological issues of this movement. Firstly, while the Slut Walks' objectives are critical, the packaging thereof may seem unclear, leaving young feminists vulnerable to the exact attacks they are fighting. Secondly, the Slut Walks were also critiqued for disregarding the experiences of woman of colour (Reger 2014).

In *Wanderlust*, Rebecca Solnit writes, “If walking is a primary cultural act and a crucial way of being in the world, those who have been unable to walk out as far as their feet would take them have been denied not merely exercise or recreation but a vast portion of their humanity” (2014:484). However, what is attested, is that a particular walking body, especially a marginalised body, changes the walking experience. It is critical to remember that for many people, traversing through public space is often subversive merely because of their marginalised physical and political background.



Fig 6: Stellenbosch Slut Walk, 2020. Digital photograph. Louise Nöthling

In the last century, marginalised people, such as women and queer individuals, have taken an active role in mobilizing forces and questioning their ascribed gender roles in society. This can be seen in the initial movements and activism of women's suffrage in Britain in 1903,¹⁶ the *First World Conference on Women* in 1975 held in Mexico City, to South Africa's Women's March in 1956 as depicted in Figure 7.¹⁷ Every August, South Africa commemorates the Women's March as a tribute to the more than 20 000 women who marched to the Union Buildings on 9 August 1956 in protest against the extension of the Pass Laws to women. South Africa's

¹⁶ See Holton, *Challenging Masculinism: personal history and microhistory in feminist studies of the women's suffrage movement* (2011).

¹⁷ See Legoabe, *The Women's March 50 Years Later...Challenges to Young Women* (2006).

government has proclaimed August as Women's Month and the 9th of August is known as Women's Day (South African Government). The Women's March was led by Helen Joseph, Sophie Williams, Lilliam Ngoyi and Rahima Moosa, who distributed a petition collecting over 100 000 signatures from women throughout South Africa. The resistance song "You strike the women, you strike a rock," was prolific during the March and these words are still used today to highlight the strength and activism of women (South African History Archive 2011). Regardless of race or class, these women stood united against the oppressive governmental systems.



Fig 7: *Women's March, July 2020*. Photograph, South African History Archive

Summary

These case studies in combination with my own creative practice, illustrate walking as an act of protest and resistance that becomes a powerful method in reclaiming space. These protests' aims were to challenge the unequal rights system that was imposed on women and queer individuals (Legoabe 2006:145). The layering of women and queer individuals' experiences stand in contrast to the oppressive patriarchal ideologies that control the freedom of mobility of these bodies. Harking back to the concept of the *flâneur* that is presented in my introduction, I begin to wonder about the possibility of women and/or queer individuals walking in the context

of South Africa. These identities are still prevented from experiencing public space and a sense of space mobility – as a cause of racial and patriarchal ideologies that are still practiced in society. As a result of this oppression, women and queer individuals participate in repeated surges of using walking as a form of protest and activism in order to reclaim public space. Therefore, in my practice-based research, I explore the experience of gendered walking and becoming a *flâneuse* in public space. In the context of my research, the *flâneuse* embodies the subjectivity and subversive gaze of women and queer individuals. In the following chapter, I argue that becoming the *flâneuse* can be used as a way to assert identity and reclaim public space. Through various case studies, I will analyse how other artists have used the concept of the *flâneuse* in their practice in order to reclaim public space.

CHAPTER TWO: WALKING, DRAWING AND WRITING IN PUBLIC SPACE

This chapter builds on the previous chapter's discussion of gender, space mobility and walking. The previous chapter's summary posits that asserting oneself as a *flâneuse* becomes a method through which to reclaim public space. In the context of my practice-based research, the *flâneuse* embodies the subjectivity of women and queer individuals in public space. In this chapter, I contrast the modernist figure of the male *flâneur* with the contemporaneity of the *flâneuse*. Comparing the experience of public space in relation to gender provides useful ways in which to understand the challenges that women and queer individuals face. This chapter discusses how post-structural feminist thinking is useful in deconstructing how one perceives gender and identity. Narratives and case studies that investigate how women and queer individuals have reclaimed public space through practices of walking, drawing and writing are reviewed in this chapter. These examples are overwritten and layered with my own creative practice of walking, drawing and writing as a *flâneuse*.

The *flâneur* challenged by the *flâneuse*

The *flâneur* is traditionally regarded as a male who would walk through the city as an observer, enchanted and taken by the scenes of modern Western civilization. First conceptualized by Charles Baudelaire and further developed by Walter Benjamin,¹⁸ the trope of the *flâneur* is popular in many urban writings. Benjamin's work is also mirrored in the interest of art and self-professed anti-art movements such as Surrealism, Dada and the Situationist International.¹⁹ For these artists, writers and performers, the city offers a site for investigation (Ingold 2008:180). The trope of the *flâneur* has given Western men the freedom to experience the energy and enigma of public space. The *flâneur* observes the cityscape and its happenings, at times disappearing into the crowd, granting him a form of anonymity. He explores urban space and the streets at leisure, as an urban wanderer and visual note-taker. The *flâneur*, at the time of origin, was written about by men with the character himself actualized as a male. A considerable amount of secondary literature has evolved around the figure of the *flâneur*, who has become popular from Benjamin and Baudelaire's writings, exploring different facets of our relationship with the urban world (Tester 1994). Therefore, thinking through my own

¹⁸ See Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (1982).

¹⁹ The *Situationist International* was a group of avant-garde artists, poets, politicians, intellectuals and performers that emerged in Paris during the 1950s. They adopted ideas of psychogeography and investigated urban spaces through artistic practices that subverted established ways of thinking of and moving through these city spaces. A popular way of walking that they adopted, was to go on *derives*, which embodied a playful and abstract manner of wayfinding. For example, a dice would be thrown and the amount thrown would direct their movements (Ingold 2008).

contemporary pedestrianism and my relationship with the city, I draw on the writings of Walter Benjamin's modernist *flâneur* of nineteenth century Paris.

A considerable amount of secondary literature is developed around the figure of the *flâneur*, exploring different facets of society's relationship with the urban world (Tester 1994). However, primary sources of this term are written through the accounts of men during the time of modernity. Janet Wolff's (1985) iconic essay, *The invisible flâneuse: Women and the literature of modernity* speaks of the exclusion of women in public space during the time of modernity. This is echoed by Deidre Heddon and Cathy Turner (2012), who describe how theories and interpretations of walking practices are predominantly explored through masculine ideologies. The exclusion of women in these texts marginalises other forms of knowledge and walking practices that can be explored from a female and queer perspective. Therefore, in this practice-based research, I assert myself as a *flâneuse* in order to practice alternative ways of engaging with the city. *Flânerie* - the deliberate act of strolling leisurely through the streets of a city to observe and document the urban landscape (Elkin 2016) – is a significant act of resistance in and of itself. Walking as a *flâneuse* is thus a methodological undertaking that becomes a powerful tool in reclaiming space. It is an attempt to reclaim the city and recreate it as a space that defies the patriarchal order, which keeps women and queer individuals as second-class citizens to the heteronormative male ideal (Elkin 2016; Solnit 2014).

With the feeling of cities being built for men, by men, the possibility of a female urban wanderer becomes restrained due to the male gaze (Dreyer & McDowall 2012:39). According to Janet Wolff (1985), the *flâneuse* is an impossible concept, because the public space of a city, and the right to look, belongs to men. Rebecca Solnit (2014) emphasizes that there is no *flâneuse*. The notion that women could easily and peacefully amble the city in observation and reflection is profoundly at odds with their political status and social role. Elfriede Dreyer and Estelle McDowall (2012:9) write that while observing, a woman herself becomes observed and subject to objectification. In comparison, the *flâneur*, who has been granted some form of anonymity on account of being male, therefore makes his presence invisible, giving him the freedom to explore and wander through the city space. On the contrary, the *flâneuse*, being a woman, is seen as a visible and vulnerable body in public space. Given South Africa's violent heteropatriarchal society, *flânerie*, therefore, is a complex act for women and queer individuals which renders them (to varying extents) as potential targets. In the context of my research, a woman and/or queer identity must therefore assert their position as a *flâneuse*, as a method of avoiding the oppressive power of the male gaze. The act of consciously entering the urban environment and walking the streets, in choosing to be observed despite the risks, is an act of resistance.

Post-structural feminism, gender and identity

Because I use the concept of the *flâneuse* as a way of encapsulating the experiences of women and queer individuals in public space, it is vital to discuss the theoretical framework through which I position my own research. To this end, post-structural feminism has given me a contemporary way of understanding gender and identity that is relevant to the current social climate. Post-structural feminism produces new ideas that help feminists re-evaluate previous suppositions about issues like performativity, politics, subjectivity and language (Davies & Gannon 2015). This theoretical framework aims to make binaries visible in the dominant categories we know of as male and female. From these terms, we begin to analyse the power of language when ascribing identity and gender. According to Susanne Gannon and Bronwyn Davies (2005), by studying past and existing texts and speech, we can see how power relations are built and sustained by rationality and normality being attributed as a default to the dominant terms within these set binaries. These binaries are practiced in a heteronormative society that boxes gender and identity into two dominant categories, namely male and female.

Examples of these set binaries include and are not limited to: straight/gay, white/black, adult/child, normal/abnormal. Through identifying the dominant term, we see how the subordinate term is noted as the 'other', the inferior, the one who lacks (Davies & Gannon 2015). Post-structural feminism explores how these dominant terms are inscribed onto 'others', such as women, people of colour, and queer individuals whose gender and sexuality transcend past cis-gendered, heteronormative belief systems. Post-structural feminism seeks to look past the dominant as the heroic, powerful and successful individual, and looks instead at the possibility of forming a new type of agency. It recognises these societal differences and aims to openly change the way we think about established norms, thoughts and practices.

Oyèrónkè Oyěwùmí (1997) analyses the ways in which some African communities existed outside of the Western gender binary system. As a strategy of colonialism, the Yoruba people were forcefully assimilated into the Western ideals of gender. Prior to European colonisation, the category known as 'woman' did not exist in the context of Yorubaland. Oyěwùmí's book, *The Invention of women: Making an African sense of Western gender discourse* (1997), critiques Western perspectives that organize gender as an elementary organising concept in society. In the Yoruba culture, gender was not fundamental to their social hierarchy, but age. The category of 'woman' only emerged once Western principles and customs were imposed on African societies (Oyěwùmí 1997). It was not only women who were disenfranchised by the law, but the very categories of men and women — classified by hierarchy and anatomy — were established by the colonial authorities (Oyěwùmí 1997). Oyěwùmí argues that the

“creation of women as a category was one of the first accomplishments of the colonial state” (1997:124).

Building on this African perspective, post-structural feminism thus theorises an important way of thinking that enables society to continue to renegotiate the gender binaries and categories that society maintains. Post-structural feminist researchers are aware of their identity through societal constructs, histories and material contexts. Judith Butler maintains that: “...the subject is neither a ground nor a product, but the permanent possibility of a certain resignifying process” (1992:13). The resignifying process indicates that our perceptions of self, influenced by our experiences and social systems, are in constant flux; there is a continual process of renegotiating the self. Rosi Braidotti describes the subject as someone who “...inhabits a time that is the active tense of “continuous becoming” (2000:62). Because this research analyses gender and identity, it’s important to position myself within this paradigm. As a queer woman of colour, I identify as a socially inscribed ‘other’ who is open to this process of “continuous becoming” (Braidotti 2000:62). Through my practice-based research, I can see how myself, and socially inscribed ‘others’ are open to the possibilities of re-positioning the self, becoming more than what they were before (Davies & Gannon 2015). The concept of ‘becoming’ within the framework of my research reiterates the idea that one has power over how they see themselves. Within that power, one can claim agency within their bodies and chosen identities, which moves beyond the binaries that are practiced in society. This in turn enables us to acknowledge the multi-faceted aspects of our identities. Judith Butler (1990) speaks of identity as multiple and in constant flux. Therefore, in my practice-based research, I analyse how the concept of ‘becoming’ a *flâneuse* becomes a method in asserting one’s identity when walking in public space.

In *Walking Women: Shifting the Tales and Scales of Mobility*, Deidre Heddon and Cathy Turner (2012) do not describe a way of walking that is specific to a singular woman, since there is no singular woman. In my research I use the concept of the *flâneuse* to encapsulate the socially inscribed ‘others’ — women and queer individuals. Through my research I want to demonstrate how the patriarchy affects these identities within public space and how these narratives overlap and are layered. In the following case studies I analyse how other women and queer artists have reclaimed public space through creative practices of walking, drawing and writing.

Walking as a flâneuse: subversive praxis

Walking seems to have a special appeal for a growing number of contemporary artists and scholars, possibly because it has the potential to lead to a particular state of consciousness. It

is a practice where you can be simultaneously aware of everything that happens in your peripheral vision and hearing, yet still get utterly lost in your own thinking process (Cuauhtémoc, Ferguson & Fisher 2007). Since Richard Long's iconic photograph, 'A Line made by Walking' (1967), artists have used walking interventions as a way of examining connections with the landscape and the environment, as well as relationships these spaces have with one another. Long's piece, shown in *Figure 8*, is regarded as a significant work in the early in the development of land and conceptual art. The piece was made by walking in a continuous line in a field of grass and photographing the result. Walking as a performance and as an art has become a central process in which an increasing number of geographers and artists map and discuss these connections from a different point of view: geographical, literary, emotional and socio-political (Cuauhtémoc *et al.* 2007:31).



Fig 8: *A Line made by Walking*, 1967. Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper with graphite on board. Richard Long

Walking as praxis explores avenues that incorporate the uncomfortable, or perplexing experiences and interventions into our daily lives.²⁰ This form of praxis has the clear intention of compelling us to interact more consciously and critically with ourselves, each other, and our environment. Walking as an inquiry for research and as a creative practice, emphasizes dialectal and informal methodologies over more traditional approaches. This in turn provides a more socially engaged and democratic approach to understanding society and contemporary life (Smith 1988). Hilary Ramsden says that "...these particular artists and practitioners have in common an attention to detail, imagination, improvisation and a sense of experimentation in form and content" (2017:58). In many of these processes, attention is now shifted towards the practitioner as actor, who produces their own interventions during their particular walks (Gallagher 2015). Tim Ingold argues that "through walking...landscapes are woven into life, and lives are woven into the landscape" (2011:47). Thus, walking practitioners and researchers are seen as co-creators of their environments.

The Situationist International, is an example of this, as the group of avant-garde artists, writers, politicians and intellectuals would engage in forms of *flânerie* through walking, drawing and writing in the city. They were seen as co-creators of the urban environment who observed and responded to the social and structural changes of the city (Swyngedouw 2002). Tim Ingold (2008) investigated some of the ways that walking has become a metaphor for artistic practice. The way we think, feel and navigate on foot can be expressed in an aesthetic practice. Walking can become of a way of thinking through and in action. This form of creating is appealing to my own practice-based research, as I seek to engage with the environment and respond to the urban environment through walking, drawing and writing as a *flâneuse*.

Carlota Guerrero, a Spanish art director and photographer, uses her project *Celebración Sexual* (2018), to emphasize the contested act of walking as a woman in public space. The project, shown in Figure 9, is a performance piece that challenges the idea of gendered space that remains largely patriarchal. Guerrero discusses how the streets of Barcelona are dominated by men and that women's experiences of public space are based on fear in the following quote: "...this group of women walked almost naked down la Rambla de Barelona...a street that is predominantly owned by men and where every girl has a story of fear to tell; it was a statement for us to take that space back" (Guerrero 2018).

Through Guerrero's project, the act of walking almost naked in public space serves as a subversive mode in reclaiming the street as women. As Rebecca Solnit asserts: "Just as

²⁰ Praxis is described as a process whereby theories are realised through a process of engagement and practice.

language limits what can be said, architecture limits where one can walk, but the walker invents other ways to go” (2000:425). Through the project *Celebración Sexual* (2018), the self-awareness of being nude, as a woman in public, aims to bring gratification to the body as well as freedom from its constraints imposed on the female form. By walking nearly naked in the streets of Barcelona, *Celebración Sexual* (2018) seeks to address the ways in which patriarchy controls women’s bodies in public space. In this sense, the participants of this project are *flâneuses*, as they asserted their identities within public space and used walking as a form of activism and protest.



Fig 9: *Celebración Sexual*, 2018. Photographs of performance piece. Carlota Guerrero

In Figure 9, the women are adorned in red attire and this colour is frequently juxtaposed with women to depict provocativeness and is used here in an even more vivid manner. The colour red embodies the way of enforcing power, seizing control and even depicting the blood of enemies, whilst simultaneously, also portraying the bloodshed of women and queer bodies (Guerrero 2018). The march itself was a symbol of demanding that the streets belong to everyone. As women are hypersexualised in society, this project aims to show the autonomy over what women wear and when they choose to wear it, as opposed to being policed over the fear of gender-based violence that manifests through sexual harassment or being cat-called.

This narrative is reflected in the experience of women and queer individuals, whose bodies remain censored under the hegemonic order of gendered public space as discussed in Chapter One. Regardless of the ideas of post-structural feminism pushing for bodily autonomy and expression of gender, women and queer bodies are still policed, censored and regulated. The assumption of asserting oneself as a *flâneuse* in public space may seem liberating on paper, but if the definition of being a male *flâneur* is to become an anonymous observer, how can this be achieved by women and queer individuals if their bodies are ascribed to being looked at? Laura Mulvey describes this through the expression of a woman's '*to-be-looked-at-ness*' (1989:19). Therefore, in combination with a walking practice, I analyse how walking *and* drawing as a *flâneuse* in public space becomes a subversive practice where the artist can use their own gaze onto the very subjects that oppress their bodies in this space.

Drawing as a *flâneuse*: asserting the gaze

Drawing is a complex concept to define. Many contemporary drawing schools of thought are opposed to classification, choosing to consider drawing as a dynamic and changing medium and subject. Brian Fay says that drawing is 'mark making,' 'works on paper,' (2013:6) or a symbol that reflects visual ideas. Drawing is not a singular specified entity which has remained unchanged. It is a practice that is continually evolving, continuously adapting to new ways, emerging innovations and conceptual perspectives (Fay 2013). Brian Fay (2013) analyses drawing as:

“...both an act that takes place in the present as in the time of the drawing's creation, while also being a trace of this action, the record of a past event or gesture. A further temporal distinction is implied through the word 'drawing' itself. In English its root is both a noun and a verb. The former implying a completed object – that which has occurred; the latter an act or process – an ongoing state of present-ness” (Fay 2013:12).

This analysis conveys my own practice of drawing as shown in Figure 10, where I walk through Stellenbosch with my visual journal as my body responds to the environment through drawing while walking. I argue that the consideration of the present moment is bound in an embodied process that documents the 'present-ness' of my body and the surface that I draw on. This 'present-ness' is further deconstructed through the context of my own body and identity conducting performance-drawing in a particular space, being Stellenbosch. This perspective builds on the idea that drawing is a continual process layered in multiplicity (Luzar 2013). Drawing is a process that involves the documentation of lines and/or gestures. It is seen as that which "forces us to think" (Deleuze 2004:62). This multiplicity of thought in action, as translated through lines made by the body, is a situated process that holds subversive power and the potential to subvert and reclaim space.



Fig 10: Dynamic drawings while walking in visual journal, 2019. Ink on paper. Mikhaila Coerecius

Gilles Deleuze (1995:146) writes that it is “multiplicity’s growth, the extension and unfolding of its lines, the production of something new”. Drawing is thus a process of thinking that enables us to co-create with our surroundings and generate new meaning. In *A delicate presence: The queer intimacy of drawing*, Sarah Casey (2016) describes how we can enrich our understanding of visual encounters through engaging with critical discourses in other fields of knowledge. She discusses how drawing is receptive to the possibilities of other states of being which, in turn, can provide new insights to how we see the world.

In Figure 11, I put ideas of multiplicity in place through layering figures on top of one another. On this day, I observed a predominantly white male demographic leisurely sitting and having their lunch under the sun on the *rooiplein* grass.²¹ While I began to draw, I thought about all the women of colour and queer people in the past; whose bodies were under constant observation and their movements monitored — if their bodies were even permitted in this space at all. I thought about my own body and identity, as a queer woman colour, interrupting this space, asserting myself through observing and recording the movements of these white bodies. bell hooks (1999) describes this process of the oppressed who looks at the oppressor as ‘the oppositional gaze’.



Fig 11: A multiplicity of line and thought, 2020. Ink on paper. Mikhaila Coerecius

²¹ The *rooiplein* is a communal outdoor area situated in the centre of Stellenbosch University.

In *The oppositional gaze: Black female spectators*, hooks theorises ways of looking that exercises a reflexive gaze. In a hegemonic society that practices racism and sexism, the idea of the gaze, and who is permitted to have one, has become a multi-dimensional relationship of power that informs these notions (hooks 1999). In this essay, hooks discusses slavery in America as an example of the constrictive control of black people looking. Looking, as a black person, was a symbol of resistance and defiance. Both Stuart Hall and Frantz Fanon have also argued the concept of black opposition to the structures of white power (hooks 1999:308). The attempt to constrict black people's 'right to gaze', only produced a further desire to look (hooks 1999:308). Through the history of oppression, black people have learned to look back as a form of rebellion, which hooks theorised as the 'oppositional gaze'.

In hook's analysis of black female spectatorship, black women were compelled to resist and be critical in order to gain a form of agency and identity. This resistance was not only aimed at the male gaze, but also at the notion of women as inadequate. Black women who have endured stigmatisation in daily life "were most inclined to develop an oppositional gaze" (hooks 1999:317). Having endured stigmatisation through sexism and racism in my own life, the reality of being a queer woman of colour forces me to confront my position in society, and to subvert this through an oppositional gaze, in order to gain agency over my identity and body.

Figure 11 practices the ways in which an oppositional gaze can be achieved through a process of drawing. Through tracing these figures in a process of blind contour drawing, I subverted my queer gaze onto white heteronormative bodies as a process of gaining my own agency through drawing as method in reclaiming space. Blind contour drawing involves a process of an uninterrupted gaze onto a subject, while attempting to not look at the surface you are drawing on. Blind drawing not only considers how one is able to break the traditional representation of the subject; it allows a way of thinking to take place that considers aspects of the subject that transcends its current visibility into a rearrangement of its contour and form (Cardoso 2013). This idea of breaking the traditional representation of the subject and the rearrangement of forms, echoes the practices of post-structural feminism. The following passage describing my drawing process in my visual journal states:

These lines become a mark of time of where I have been and what I have seen. I am using drawing as a way of seeing. It becomes an act of really focusing on what I am seeing, feeling, what catches my attention. It is the freedom of the line that creates an unbound and immortal expression of what was experienced in those moments...I am embodying my own gaze onto paper, recreating this gaze into lines. I am moving my body through time and space, taking in and documenting the smallest of forces. When drawing we tend to get swept up in the technicalities and attention to realistic rendering

of the visual image. But through blind contouring, you allow a feeling, an impression of the line and form to flow freely, with little regard to its ability to replicate what is being seen (Coerecius 2020).

This entry in my visual journal practices post-structural feminist thinking as the subjects in Figure 11 are characterised through mismatched shapes and the composition, or frame of the drawing, is less controlled, leading to an interesting rearrangement of the subject of your gaze (Cardoso 2013). I argue that a process of blind contour drawing thus defies the traditional representational order. It becomes a process of asserting an oppositional gaze and is a manner of producing meaning and feeling to the present moment. Drawing as a *flâneuse* becomes a way of responding to the patriarchal order that persists in public space, thus asserting my own subjectivity and gaze in this drawing process becomes a way of reclaiming space.

Writing as a *flâneuse*: an intersectional approach

Intersectional feminist methodologies and the playful art of writing (Lykke 2014), considers that writing, methodology, method, ethics, politics and epistemology are intricately connected. The text focuses on feminist frameworks that reflect on these concerns and raises key questions of how intersectionality is currently at the centre of many feminist debates and writing. The term intersectionality involves the power of difference in social categorisations based on race, ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability and age (Lykke 2014). I focus on this term in my writing process because the *flâneuse* embodies these intersectional identities through exploring how women and queer individuals experience space. What does intersectional writing mean when analysing monolithic identity classifications such as race, ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability and age? Nina Lykke (2014) theorises that the ‘politics of location’ and the notion that knowledge production should be viewed as situated is a fundamental starting point in numerous feminist epistemologies. This pushes scholars to reflect on the position from which they are writing from and the “embodied location of the textual subject of their scholarly writing” (Lykke 2014:11). Thus posing the question of who is the ‘I’ or ‘we’ that exists in the text? When speaking of other subjects, it is thus important to reflect on the ethics and politics of engaging with and signifying the ‘other’ in my research.

Intersectional writing according to feminist scholar Jasbir Puar contends that the multiplicities of identity should not be regarded as fixed categories, but as “assemblages” and as “interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherence and permanency” (2007:212). In light of this, I believe it is critical to investigate how intersectional writing in my practice takes into account the complexities of multiple, fluid, and open-ended possibilities, with the goal of unravelling alternative, engaged, and ethical ways to

in which to write the "I" and "we" in my research. To this end, writing as a *flâneuse* becomes a method through which I can practice intersectional writing. I argue that the narratives and case studies I use throughout this paper are multi-layered and connected. As a queer woman of colour, I consider myself as the 'other', thus embodying both the "I" and "we" in my research. Despite speaking of myself as the "I" from a research point of view, I aim to show how these narratives and experiences of public space overlap, thus unifying the "we" – women and queer identities. In the following case studies, I analyse how myself and other women and queer creatives have used intersectional writing in their practice as a way of reclaiming space.

Writing as a *flâneuse* in public space

The context of women and queer individuals in relation to gender-based violence is discussed in Chapter One and in this section, I continue to explore creative and activist practices within South African public space. As Nina Lykke (2014) maintains that the 'politics of location' is important when situating intersectional writing practices, the following figures analyse writing as a *flâneuse* in public space in South Africa. Figure 12 is a journal entry I wrote when walking with a friend in Cape Town. The friend, who had emigrated to New Zealand, forgot about her feelings of embodied fear as a woman that she had previously experienced in South Africa. On this day, she insisted that we walk confidently and enjoy the pleasures of the urban landscape that we were taught to fear, and even avoid as women. This resonated with my practice, because walking as a *flâneuse* involves actively engaging with the public space. As we engaged in our own act of *flânerie* while wandering and getting lost in the city, I reflected on this sense of embodied fear and wrote the following entry while walking in public space as depicted in Figure 12:

I shoved ideas of fear and vulnerability away. We strutted confidently, we took in the scenes and suddenly this bodily discourse I had in my head disappeared...on that day I felt free and lifted, and if for once I stopped myself from meditating on the imminent and lurking dangers. Is this what it's like to walk like man?...Is walking an attitude? Does confidence really tame fear? At least, what we've been told and taught to fear. This is in the spirit of my practice, bold exploration...imprinting scenes and nuances of the city, seeing the slabs of concrete as a prison we've built for ourselves (Coerecius 2020).

When analysing this passage, I see the use of the terms 'I' and 'we', connecting and layering my own experience with the intersectionality of other women and queer individuals who have been taught to fear public space in South Africa in light of gender-based violence. Through embodying the trope of the *flâneuse* I was able to liberate myself on this day and reclaim public

space through the act of walking and writing. I asserted myself in the city and used my journal as a way of recording my thoughts in action.

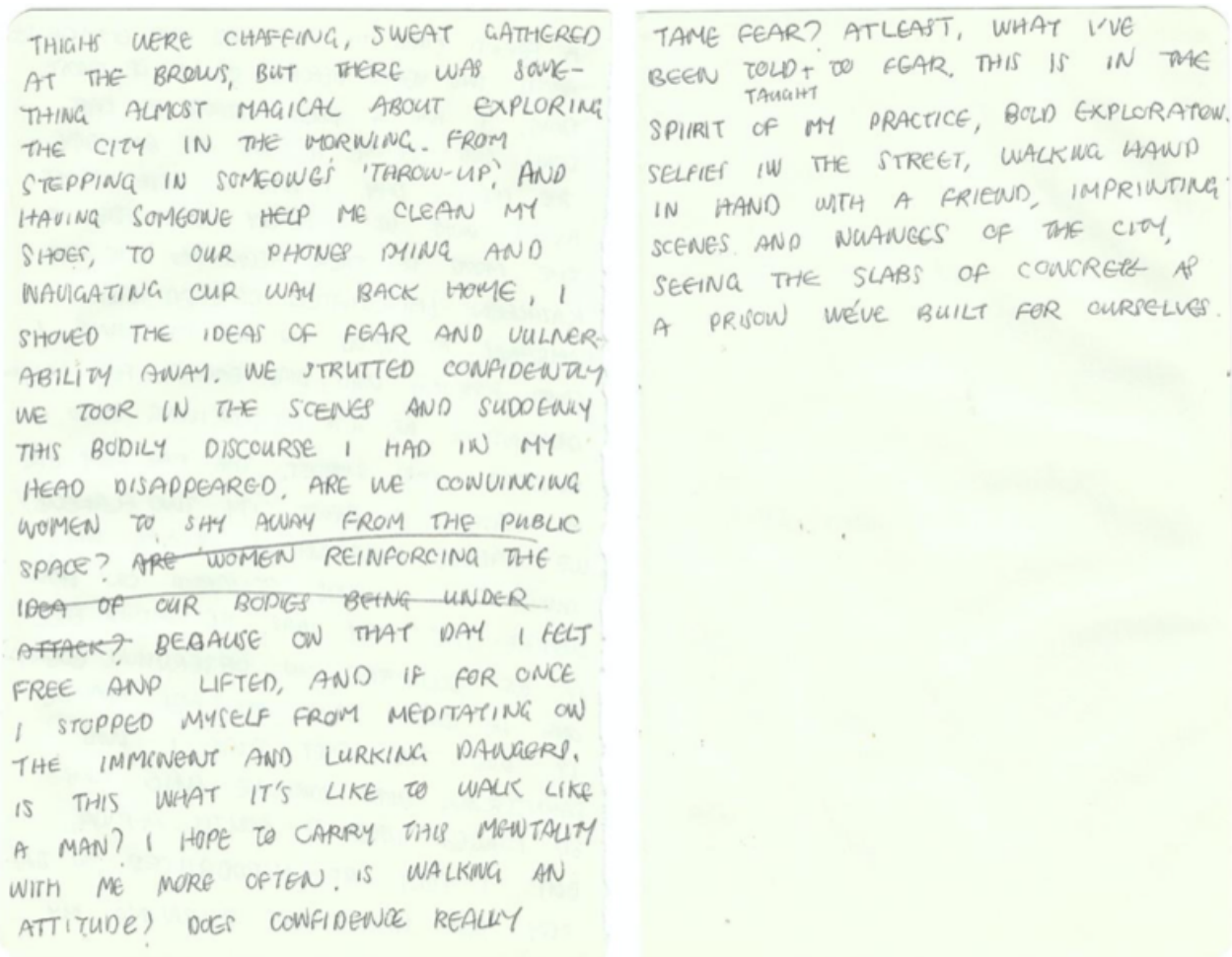


Fig 12: *Reflections on flânerie in the city*, 2020. Pen on paper. Mikhaila Coerecius

When looking at other case studies of asserting identity in public space, the community campaign, *Cat Calls of Cape Town* is a powerful example of how writing in public space is used as a form of protest and activism. The campaign aims to share the narratives of women and queer individuals through using instances of cat calls and street harassment to shed light on the continued struggle of equitable access to public space and space mobility. *Cat Calls of Cape Town* receives submissions from women and queer individuals who share their painful experiences of violence and objectification as shown in Figure 13. The campaign uses the act of street chalking as a method of writing that asserts the narrative that women and queer individuals are not safe in South Africa. Street chalking emphasizes the temporality of space as the words eventually fade by the walking footsteps that wears these narratives down, yet

the campaign continues to over-write these pavements as a reminder of the ongoing struggles faced within public space. As an effective strategy in sharing these narratives, *Cat Calls of Cape Town* practices writing not only in public space, but in cyberspace too. The campaign uses *Instagram* as a way of documenting and sharing these narratives, encouraging women and queer individuals to write their own experiences on the pavements where their bodies were wrongfully harmed.

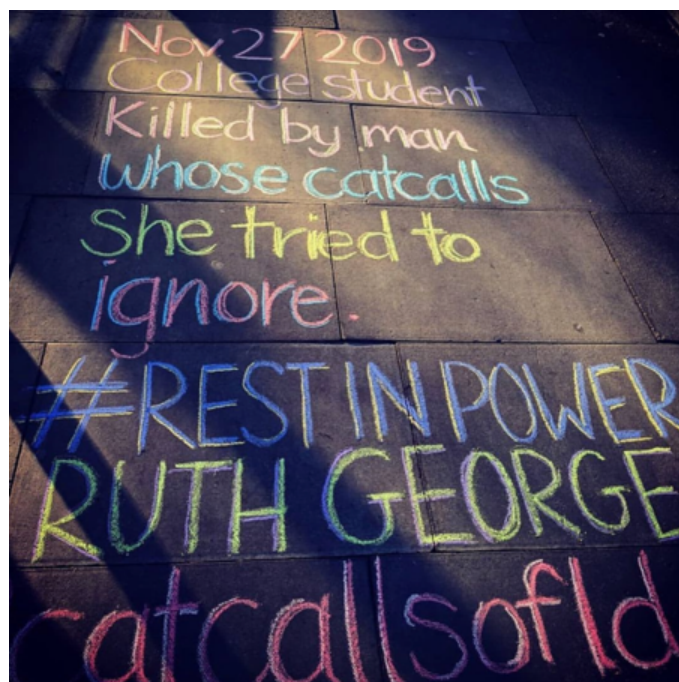


Fig 13: *Street Chalking* (2019). Screenshot of *Instagram* post. @catcallsofcapetown

The ways in which *Cat Calls of Cape Town* functions in both public and cyberspace is an interesting relationship in how physical spaces and virtual spaces can work in tandem in sharing the narratives of women and queer individuals. Other established South African campaigns and community profiles that engage in discourses on gender, identity, and gender-based violence through cyberspace are @girlsagainstoppression, @sonkegenderjustice, @langaformen, @keeptheenergy and @protest_praxis. Although my research has focused on creative practices within public space thus far, I will now analyse how using cyberspace – a virtual extension of public space, also becomes a method in reclaiming space and asserting identity online.

Writing and sharing narratives in cyberspace

In *Rise of the network society*, Manuel Castells (2011) speaks of the power of cyberspace being able to form a new society where community and sociability are based on social exchanges rather than physical location. Castell theorises that ‘networked individualism’ forms communities according to interests, values, and projects with a sense of solidarity that is not tied to traditional hierarchies experienced in the world. For many individuals, sharing personal narratives of their lives becomes a reclaiming tool in advocating for gender non-conforming and queer bodies in cyberspace, whilst educating the public online.

Kim Windvogel, is a queer South African writer and activist, who shares their work in both public space and cyberspace. Kim identifies as non-binary, under the *Instagram* name @blazingnonbinary and they use social media platforms to engage in subversive and educational writing practices on *Instagram*.²² Windvogel aims to discuss topics related to sex education, sexuality, activism, identity and gender on *Instagram* in order to empower and educate people, validate queer individuals and create a space where queer issues can be made accessible and thereby understood and embraced (Kippie 2019).

Using *Instagram* as a form of online journaling also helps Windvogel’s followers, who connect with these topics, to experience a sense of belonging and support online. The experience of belonging for these individuals may or may not be reflected in offline contexts. I argue that through discursive writing practices online, a web of connections can form, that transcends physical space. As a result, alternative spaces are created where sharing personal narratives becomes a point of departure when educating other people about identity, gender and sexuality.

²² People who identify as non-binary use the terms they/them as identifiers.

The power of social media that is discussed, is echoed through Third Space theory. Media artist Randall Packer (2014) conceptualises Third Space as a shared electronic social space that allows of 'networked individualism' to take place. Third Space is the notion that physical space and cyberspace is negotiated in order to create a hybrid space that allows individuals and communities to engage with each another regardless of physical displacement. Thus, social media platforms become a constructive tool not only in engaging with and reaffirming your own identity, but through sharing these stories, communities can form and education can take place that transcends the normative standards of being in public space. Third Space in relation to this research, is a space where women and queer individuals can use queering and activist practices in order to reclaim space. *Instagram* becomes the Third Space as a site of empowerment, resistance, artistic practice and agency.

Traditional ways of addressing activism required a physical offline presence, such as civil marches, protests, strikes and televised social movements. The use of social media platforms offers dynamic solutions for engagement and the spreading of ideas that functions effectively in a contemporary, technologically-driven society (Kippie 2019). Windvogel discusses this sense of community amongst the youth on *Instagram* as a platform:

For my writing I believe that Instagram has been my favourite tool. This is where people love engaging with my kind of work. I write about sex a lot. Being queer is also one of my favourite topics to write about. I think that Instagram is a great place to share your work because many older people do not frequent that space and I believe people are more likely to 'love' your provocative upload (Windvogel 2018).

The idea of sharing personal and provocative writing on *Instagram* is shown in Figure 14, a screenshot of a poem I wrote describing my experience of being queer online as confusing. The writing shared in this post is from an entry in my visual journal. The tile, *Musings on being queer in a hetero-patriarchal sosaatie* (2020) describes the humorous, yet critical approach in analysing queerness online. The reference of the word 'sosaatie' refers to a phrase in memes typically stating,²³ 'We live in a sosaatie', thereby critiquing and subverting the word 'society', making a satirical remark about the social conditions in which we live, comparing society to a piece of meat. A successful example of subversive writing methods is through memes, which

²³ In contemporary digital society, memes have become a method of communication that combines various ideas together. The images have formats that are appropriated in different contexts, sometimes bizarre, sometimes political, sometimes void of meaning at all – which also critiques the way contemporary society values or devalues the idea of meaning.

does more than simply amuse. A growing body of research has shown that they are used for a variety of reasons, ranging from political activism and protest, to community building and as an emotional expression (Milner 2016; Shifman 2013).

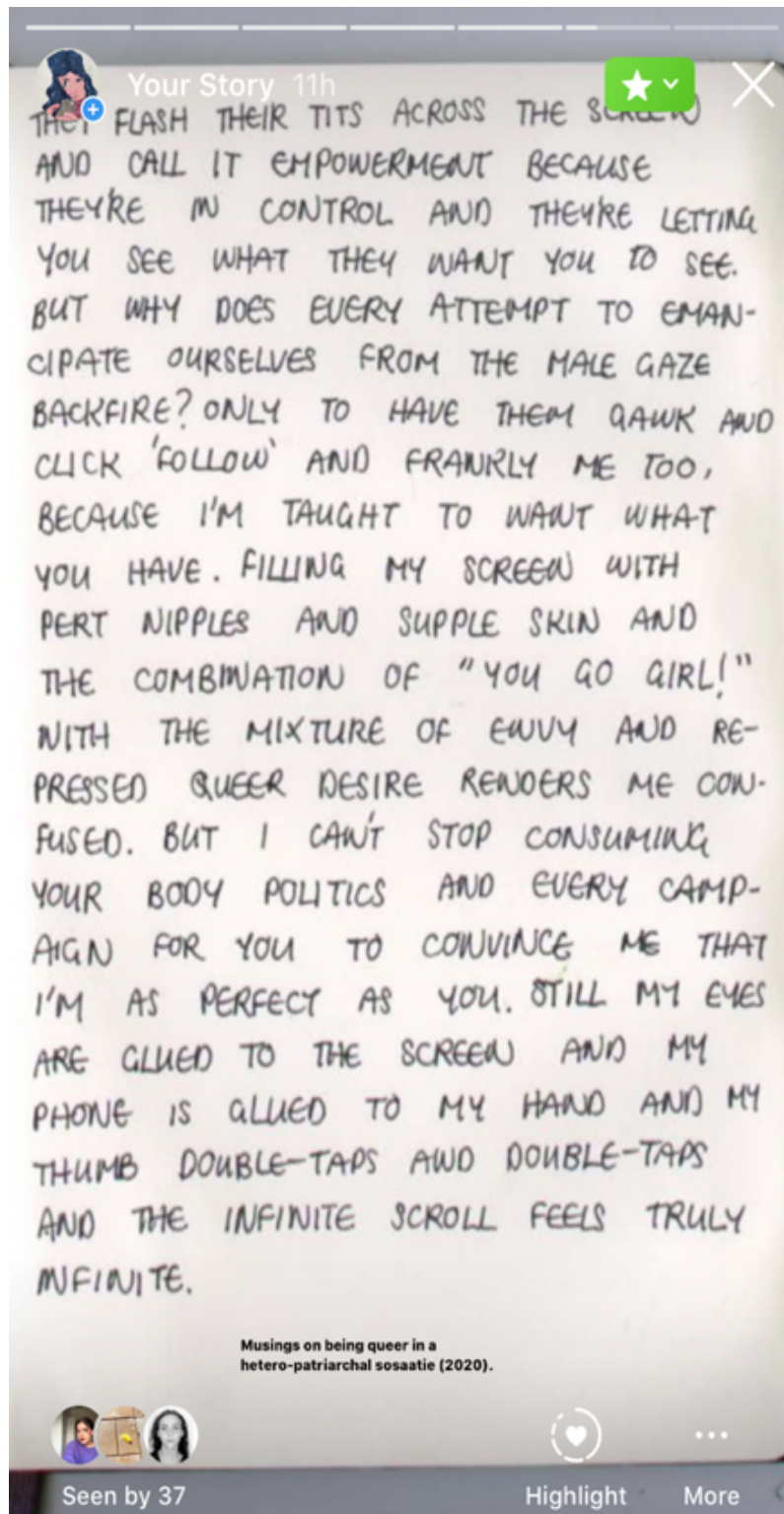


Fig 14. *Musings on being queer in a hetero-patriarchal sosaatie (2020)*. Screenshot of Instagram story, writing by Mikhaila Coerecius

Theorist Graham Meikle argues that social media has transformed the way we interact with one another every day and has thus presented contemporary society with a collection of new behaviours and rules. He states: “the media is no longer just what we watch, read or listen to – the media is now what we do” (2014:374). Social networking has the potential to render social media platform users ‘visible’ to each other in new, diverse ways. Meikle believes that social media has the potential to make people who have historically been ‘invisible’, visible (2014:375). Cyberspace poses the possibility of gaining agency through removing the veil of vulnerability. The screen acts as a conduit through which you can express yourself. Writing online creates a transparent space whereby the writer views the process as journaling, and openly communicates. Sharing personal narratives or perspectives on *Instagram* “is key to making the invisible visible in the networked digital environment of social media” (Meikle 2014:377).

Kim Windvogel, as an activist and queer role model, increases the visibility of bodies and identities like theirs online. Windvogel shares their personal narratives in an attempt to give people who are discriminated against on the grounds of their gender, body or sexuality, a stronger voice online that may materially echo in offline contexts as well (Kippie 2019). Using *Instagram* as a platform to share writing practices is an activist stance that increases the visibility of minorities online in an attempt to educate online and for these discussions to continue in *both* public space and cyberspace.

Summary

In comparing the figure of the modernist male *flâneur* to the contemporary *flâneuse*, I discuss how the *flâneuse* becomes an alternative way asserting gender and identity in public space. The use of the term *flâneuse* in my study is used as both a method and a way of embodying the experience of women and queer individuals in public space. These experiences are portrayed through the use of narrative inquiry as my chosen methodology, as I gather the stories of women and queer individuals through their practices of walking, drawing and writing as a form of protest and activism. In examining the case studies of these women and queer individuals, I weave my own practice throughout, enabling me to understand how these layered narratives are intersectional. I adopt a post-structural feminist framework throughout when considering how gender and identity is experienced in a patriarchal and heteronormative society. This chapter not only builds on my previous chapter’s analysis of public space, but begins to consider how the internet, as an online platform, also becomes a space through which women and queer individuals can situate their creative practices. I introduce the concept of cyberspace and in the following chapter I will delve further into how myself as a *flâneuse* uses walking, drawing and writing online as a way of reclaiming space.

CHAPTER THREE: THE VIRTUAL FLÂNEUSE IN CYBERSPACE

This chapter examines my method of exploration as a virtual *flâneuse* in cyberspace. The use of the term virtual *flâneuse* is informed by Catherine Russell's (2002) conception of the *flâneuse* as cyberfeminist. Chapter One and Two explored how I gathered narratives of women and queer individuals from public space, and in this third chapter, I explore how I gather and observe narratives in cyberspace through taking digital walks. Walking is such a central theme to my practice-based research that I began to think of ways of connecting and layering walking practices in my exploration of cyberspace. Therefore, similar to engaging in a walking practice in Chapter One and Chapter Two, this chapter engages in a virtual walking practice as I take digital strolls through *Instagram* as a way of expanding my practice as a *flâneuse* from the public space, into cyberspace. This chapter explores themes of reclaiming space through narratives of women and queer individuals online. Each section of this chapter explores narratives I observed and explored while strolling through *Instagram*. I use *Instagram* as a site of investigation and focus on themes of body politics on social media, self-representation through selfie-practices and how identity is performed online. These topics are analysed in relation to cyberfeminism as a theoretical framework which complements post-structural feminism and its ideologies which transcends heteronormative ideals and gender binaries. Drawing inspiration from the themes and narratives found on *Instagram*, this chapter explores my own creative practice that engages with the process of layering and distortion in my works as ways of reclaiming space as a queer woman online.

The *flâneuse* in cyberspace

Catherine Russell (2002) examines the *flâneuse* as cyberfeminist, who in her definition, embodies the fictional construction of a woman's subjectivity. Russell elaborates on this concept of the *flâneuse* as cyberfeminist by drawing a connection to feminist film theory which speaks of the 'spectator-subject' (2002:1). In the initial stages of my research, I focused on the effects of the male gaze in public space, which places emphasis and power on the male as subject and the woman as object, rendering her passive and inescapable from its glare. However, through speaking of the woman as the spectator-subject, agency is assumed in a woman's subjectivity and power is given to her own gaze, an active gaze that she herself asserts onto the world. "The spectator...is an embodied, socially configured and heterogeneous construction" (Russell 2002: 3). In the context of my research, the virtual *flâneuse*, as spectator within cyberspace, is a 'heterogeneous construction' that embodies much more than the experience of the singular woman. In fact, the singular woman does not exist in a post-structural framework. As Judith Butler (1990) speaks of identity as multiple and in constant flux, the virtual *flâneuse* as spectator-subject embodies the identities of the entire

queer community, a group of people who have also endured the oppression of the patriarchy and effects of a violent and even fetishized male gaze.

My artistic practice seeks to look at the ways in which women and queer bodies claim agency online and to create pieces that speak of this. Being a traveller through the planes of the internet, the mobility of the virtual *flâneuse* in combination with the intertextuality of the screen makes participation of the spectator exceedingly active. My research aims to place an agency and establish a narrative of women and queer individuals who *look* rather than being *looked at*, and in this way give a sense of agency to their narratives. This chapter discusses an exploration through cyberspace, as I, the researcher, adopt the role of a virtual *flâneuse* as a method of data collection.²⁴ By using the role of the virtual *flâneuse* as a data collection method, I am creating a practice-based research process that allows me to experience intersectional perspectives and spaces that may be inaccessible in public space. As the virtual world is not bound by movement, distance or time, connections and interactions span globally, and physical space is mediated and diminished. The internet has the potential to provide platforms and safe spaces for intersectional identities and women to engage in online activism and self-expression that may not be possible in public spaces (Kippie 2019).

As my material body is left behind, escaping the confining realms of public space, I travel across the planes of the internet and my virtual body is transported through binary code. My fingers respond to the conditioned gestures of clicking, swiping, tapping, and scrolling while my mind absorbs the stimulus of pixels and sounds. Every time I log in, I take a digital walk and this chapter serves as a travel log of everything I have seen. This form of strolling and scrolling has the potential to unlock worlds both real and imaginary and is analysed through my artistic practice in cyberspace. As I walk through *Instagram*, I observe the ways in which women and queer identities express themselves, and through these narratives, I respond and co-create through pieces that engage with themes of cyberspace.

One moves through public space with the physical body and moves through cyberspace with the virtual body. Through gathering the narratives of women and queer bodies online, and exploring a dynamic creative practice, diffractions begin to form through this theme. Abstract lines and forms translate the process of walking through cyberspace in Figure 15. Our identities are organic and ever-changing and the forms in Figure 15 interrogate the versions of ourselves that connect, ebb and flow into and out of each other as theorised by Butler (1990). According

²⁴ The concept of the *flâneuse* moves through public space and for my ventures online, I have appropriated this term to describe the actions and feelings of moving through cyberspace.

to Butler (1990) our identities are in constant flux and this concept was practiced in Figure 15 through the use of drawing ink and water that mixed together and concentrated in certain areas and continued to bleed into lighter shades and forms that were different from their initial drop on the sheet of paper.

The process of layering and erasing in varying degrees of ink and water can be read through Butler's "resignifying process" (2004:13) as discussed in Chapter Two. In this performative action of layering and erasing, then over-writing marks in pencil, I imagine situating my own identity, erasing it, and re-situating it through a process of "becoming" (Braidotti 2001:62). From a personal perspective, the process of 'becoming' is reflected in my own experience of realising my identity as a queer woman. This process was largely informed through my time spent scouring the internet as a *flâneuse*, engaging with cyberfeminist texts that advocated for the visibility and assertion of identity in online spaces. Cyberspace produces the idea of a Third Space, where minorities are able to exist in ways that may not be possible in public space.



Fig 15: *Becoming online*, 2020. Mixed-media drawing. Mikhaila Coerecius

Cyberfeminism, binaries and beyond

Judy Wajcman's book, *Technofeminism* (2004), supplies a comprehensive overview of the role that gender plays in technology. The virtual community represents a new form of sociability and interaction. However, this needs to be understood in the context of contemporary debates discussing the increasing personal and social fragmentation and the loss of our civil society in the digital age of information and identity construction.

Sadie Plant (1998:38) argues that the internet is a distributed nonlinear world where a woman's mode of being can adapt to the unpredictable ways in which virtual reality cannot be controlled. She says that women excel within fluid systems and processes and in Figure 15, I depict this argument through bold forms of colour, breaking through the frame and structure which represents the emancipated way women adapt and break free from structures. The shift of traditional power dynamics from men to women is seen in the replacement and need for muscular strength in the workplace as the demand for "speed, intelligence and transferable, interpersonal and communication skills" (Plant 1998:38) become essential. It is important to see people within their network of connections. Cyberfeminism and post-structural feminism aim to achieve this by viewing these relationships as an open, fluid and indistinct semiotic flow.

Donna Haraway (1991) conceives the concept of a cyborg in a post-gender world. As we look to theorists such as Judith Butler who analyse identity construction from a post-structural feminist perspective, we begin to see a social reality that transcends binaries, especially on the internet where communities of LGBTQIA+ people have formed. If gender and identity are constructed and we become what we consume, or at least what is exposed to us, then online public space becomes a potential tool for societal transformation where a plethora of identities can occupy space in ones and zeros.

Early cyberfeminists conceived cyberspaces as highly liberating, theorizing their desire to transition beyond conventional limitations and binaries of popular gender and feminist thought at the time. These spaces on the internet and in technology were imagined as having the capacity to facilitate a "post-gender world" (Haraway 1991:150). Initially, cyber spaces were envisioned as idealistic sites of unregulated, transcendent freedom from the traditional constraints linked to gender (Plant 1998). Figure 15 and 16 are pieces I created that conceives of the idea of Haraway's "post-gender world" through the void of any visual representation of a body, or identity (1991:150).

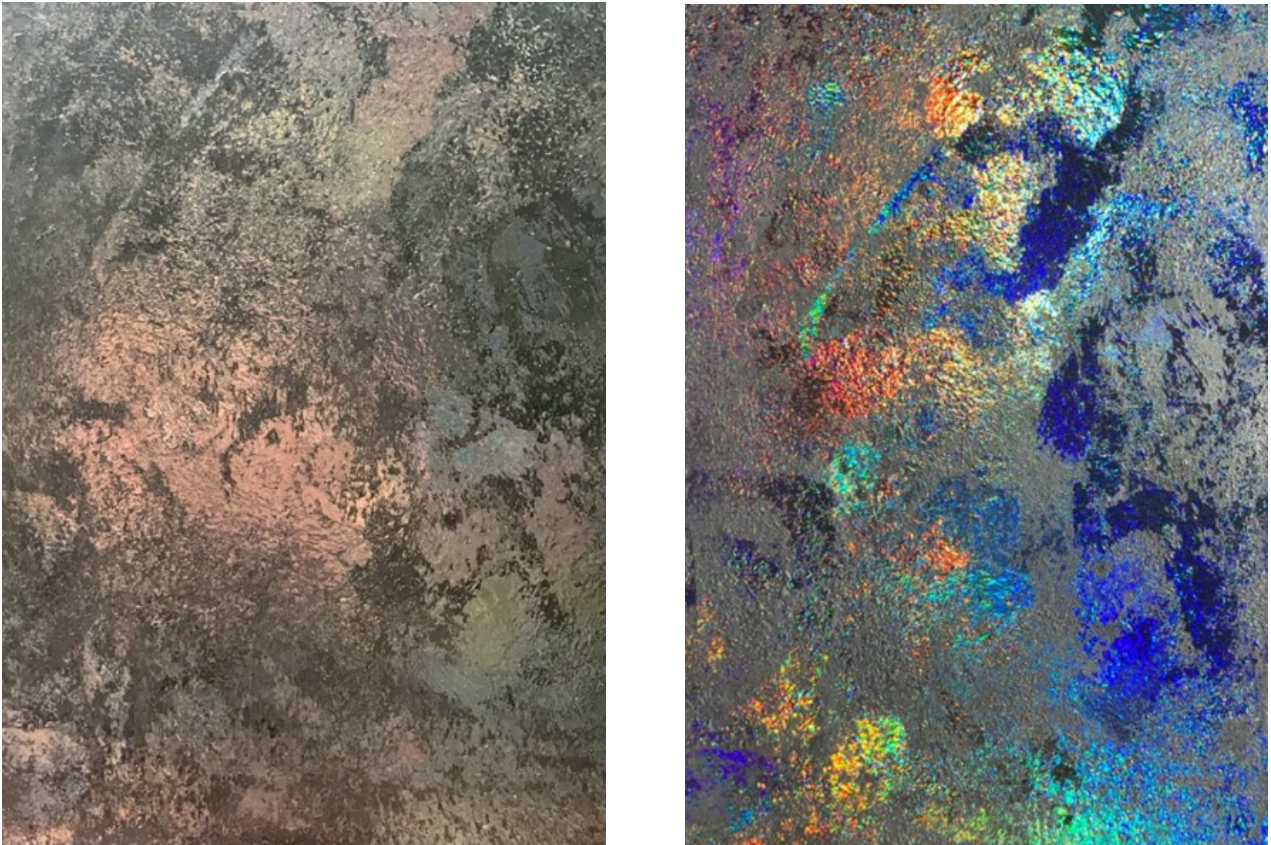


Fig 16: Beyond binaries, 2020. Mixed media on wooden canvas. Mikhaila Coerecius

When viewed in person, the silver film that was scratched onto the surface diffracts light and distorts the reflection of the viewer, further dissecting any visual representation of the person who looks, in part. On the left-side of Figure 16 is a photograph taken of the piece when standing directly in front of it. The reflection of parts of my body is seen through the reflection of the layered textures. On right-side of Figure 16 is a photograph taken of the piece while walking past it, creating an effect that distorts the viewer's reflection into a burst of rainbow colours. The rainbow colours, similar to those of the Pride Flag of the LGBTQIA+ community, depicted in Figure 18, symbolize the visibility of multiple existing identities. Figure 16 and 17 practices the idea of transcending our traditional, binary ways of thinking of identity and gender through changing one's perspective. As the viewer moves and shifts their position, the colours and reflection of the person transforms, indicating a process of "continuous becoming", becoming more than what they were before through opening possibilities of re-positioning the self (Braidotti 2000:62).

According to Sally Munt (2001), cyberspaces show a promise of dislocating conventional patriarchal hierarchies, colonial interests of power, and advanced capitalism's militarized,

commercialized technologies, embodying a bold new future for society. In this bold new future, the power structures and institutionalized logic that favours the societally privileged is restructured and social disparities are addressed to work towards furthering social equality (Haraway 1991).



Fig 17: *Layered Identity*, 2021. Mixed-media painting. Mikhaila Coerecius.



Fig 18: Original Gay Pride flag design, 1978. Gilbert Baker.

Nevertheless, despite this idealistic perspective, it quickly became evident that feminist issues would manifest in these online spaces too. Extensive socio-political contexts influence the way in which cyberspace environments are constructed. Linear discourses of colonial, patriarchal and capitalist advancements are further proliferated in these spaces due to the privileged position in society these people hold (Milford 2015:56). Because of this privilege, the issues that minority and intersectional bodies face are largely diminished. In this sense, conventional narrative discourses that favours male over female, hetero- over homosexual, and Caucasian over any other racialized identity, affects the freedom of expression minorities have within these cyberspaces. It constrains people's agencies online, destabilizing the equal opportunity to participate in digital society.

Political and social discourses that tackle matters of online inequality – including cyberfeminist debates – are also critiqued for the tendency to assume these linear and dichotomous progress narratives. These narratives include discussions of virtual spaces as liberating vs. constraining, the online vs. offline experience, self-regulation and freedom of expression vs. censorship and policy responses, to name a few. These progressive narratives are more commonly accepted, rather than critiqued, and end up perpetuating the same binary notions of gender in virtual space that cyberfeminists have attempted to escape and overcome (Milford 2015:57). Regardless of my research aiming to find methods of reclaiming public and cyberspace, I am aware of the pitfalls of this utopian perspective. In the case studies that I include throughout this thesis, I hope for these narratives to fill the gaps created by binary thinking and for these stories to facilitate an inclusive, productive, empowering and intersectional discussion of the virtual world.

Various cyberspaces provide a platform for intersectional identities to express themselves and forge a space where people can connect online if they are unable to do so in the physical and material realities they find themselves in. This statement rings true to the effects of Covid-19 where lockdown procedures were initiated from March in 2020 and the public became bound to their homes. People began to work remotely and internet activity increased. As a way of staying in touch and maintaining a sense of community, social media platforms such as *Instagram* became a way for people to connect and to continue discourses that were prevalent in public space at the time.

Instagram as site of investigation

In my practice-based research, I have chosen to focus on *Instagram*, a popular mobile, online, video and image-sharing social media platform with rough estimates of one billion active users per month. The platform enables its users to share content and simultaneously upload the material to other social media platforms such as *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Flickr* and *Tumblr* (Faust 2017:160). The interactivity of *Instagram* is seen in the ways you can share your life with friends, family and the public through their various features. These features include the ‘story’ function, which allows users to upload and record content in real-time so that other users can react and respond, but the duration of the story is only active for twenty-four hours; as well as the ‘reels’ or ‘IGTV’ functions, which allow users to upload longer videos that remains on their feed. *Instagram* also allows for 2,200 characters in a post’s caption (*Instagram* 2018). This feature is beneficial for my own research and practice, as online journaling provides me with a lens through which to see how I, as a virtual *flâneuse*, am able to reclaim space through walking, drawing and writing online.

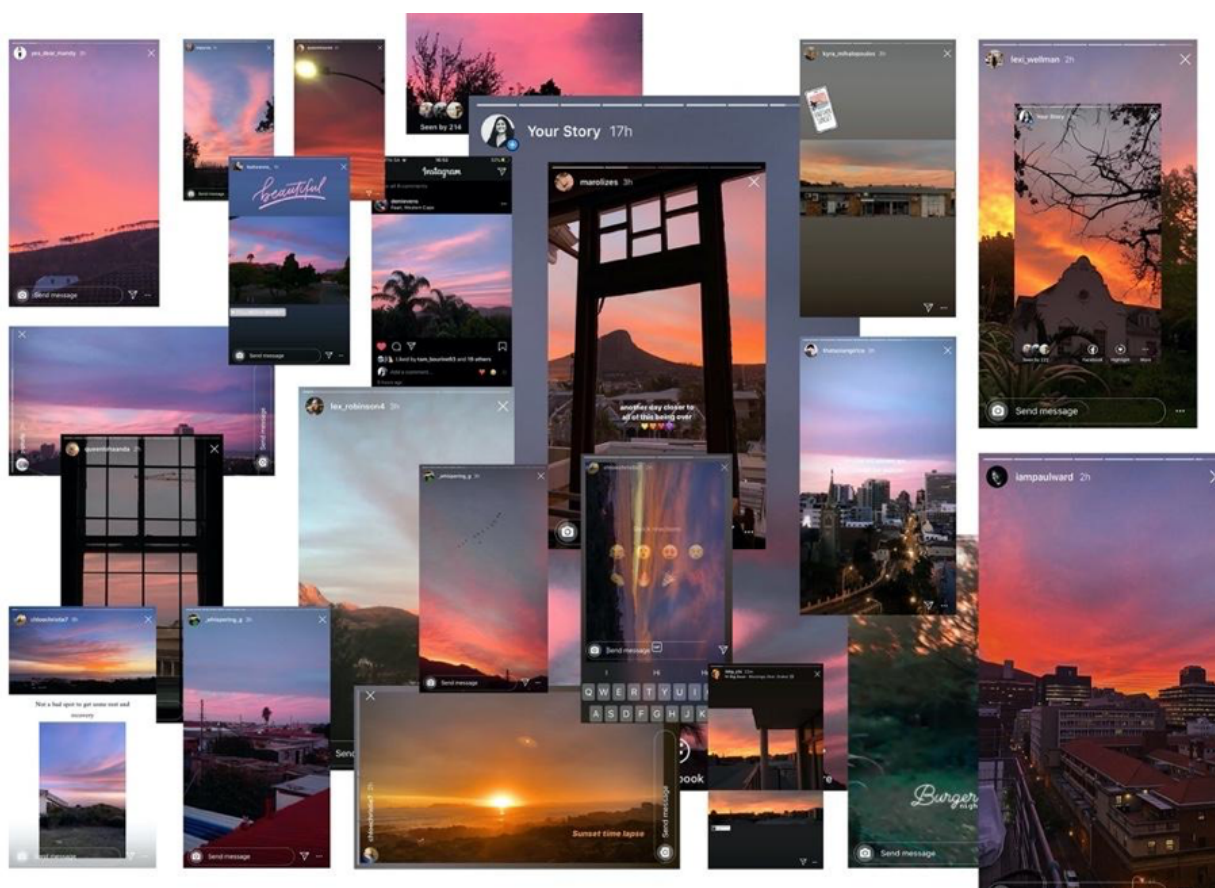


Fig 19: *Instagram* stories upon stories in stories through stories, 2020. Screenshots of *Instagram* stories. Mikhaila Coerecius

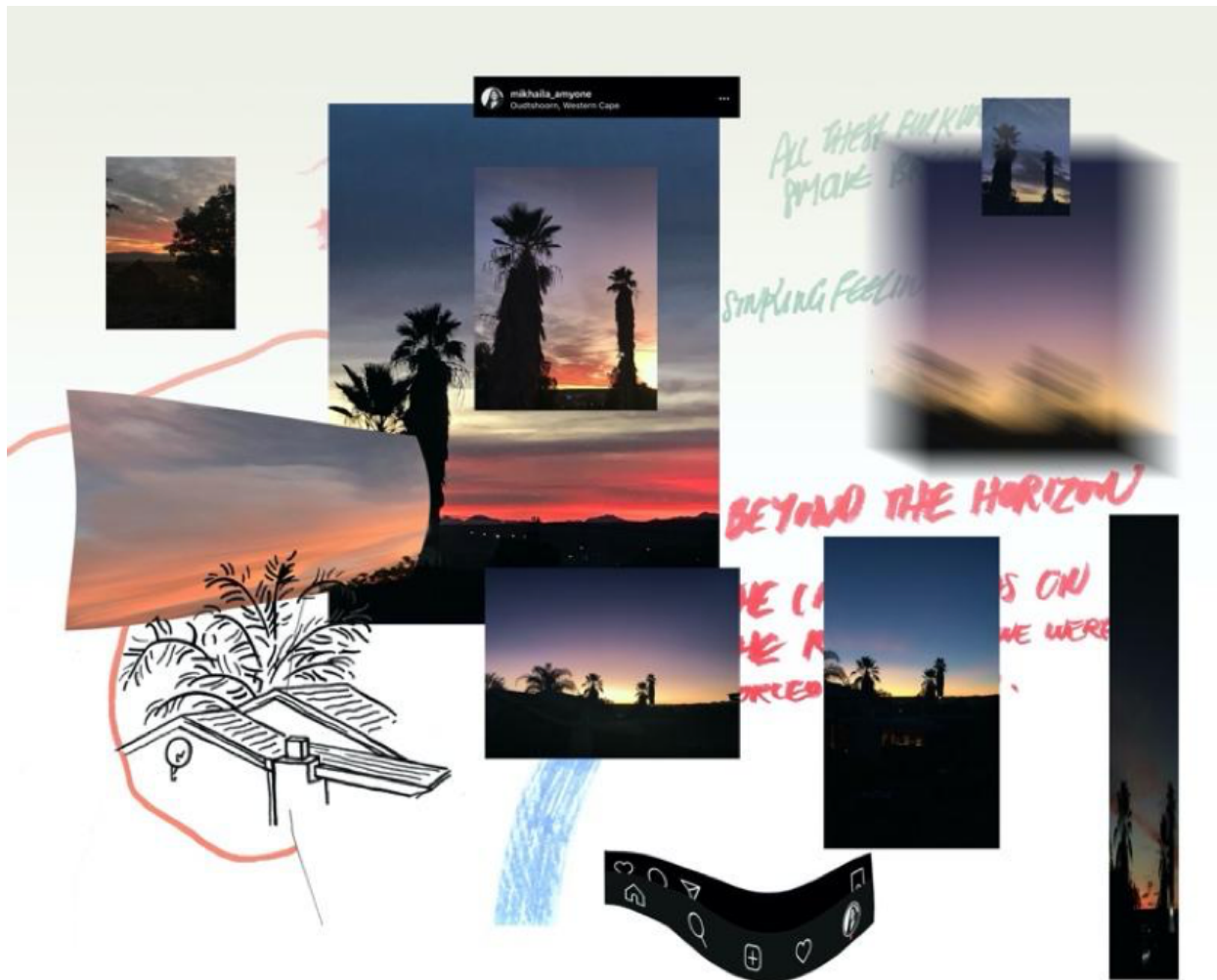


Fig 20: Just another sunset on *Instagram*, 2020. Mixed-media collage and drawing. Mikhaila Coerecius.



Fig 21: *Always on my Screen*, 2020. Mixed-media drawing on Fabriano. Mikhaila Coerecius.

Body Politics on Social Media

Social media has transformed the way people connect with and integrate with the world around them. The emergence and extensive development of the internet have reorganized the media landscape to a remarkable extent. Its effects have created a rapid evolution in contemporary society (Wigston 2009:30). The internet, in combination with social media platforms and its practices, has facilitated new forms of social communication and systems. Traditional structures of human interaction and identity politics have altered because of this (Crystal 2011:32).

Social media is a powerful force within contemporary society. Its foundation is built upon digitization, multimodality and merging of all forms of media. Anybody with access to a smartphone has the possibility to create, curate and publish content. Social media can be thought of as an open forum which permits anyone to be heard. It can broaden discussions, which in turn allows for infinite cultural creation as networked individuals can form online communities. Shared media facilitates social awareness, expands knowledge, produces infinite ways of being (Faust 2017:159). Social media provides a platform for discursive practices and offers spaces for alternative communities and identities to exist (Kippie 2019:38).

However, not all identities and communities are treated the same. Gender-based violence is not only an issue that is faced in public and private spaces, but in online spaces too. Developers of platforms on the internet have imagined a utopia of free-flowing information for the benefit of all its users without consideration of the possible harm that might result from such a space. This point is described by Boyd (2015): “We didn’t architect for prejudice, but we didn’t design systems to combat it either.” The media company, WIRED, believes that internet platforms, engineers and services have a duty to safeguard their users from forms of abuse by private individuals or collectives that inflict social harm. This statement is further elaborated upon in the following quote:

You were supposed to be the blossoming of a million voices. We were all going to democratize access to information together. But some of your users have taken that freedom as a license to victimize others. This is not fine. . . . As you got bigger and stronger, more people wanted to talk—but some of them were jerks, or worse (WIRED Staff 2016).

Tackling gender-based violence and hate speech online requires extensive social change. Socially meaningful content that provides safe spaces for communities is not always

generated. Despite the internet providing an infinite amount of connections and information to be discovered, it can also become a vacuum of information that becomes inescapable once caught in its trap – from fake news and sensational tabloids to hate speech and discrimination. It is as though the simple act of logging in can become a mundane and repetitive task, comparable to the act of opening and re-opening the fridge in your kitchen. You know what food you have, but every time you open the fridge, you wonder if something new might have appeared. It has not. The light goes on, you linger for a few seconds, and close the door again.

Self(ie)-representation and digital subjectivity

There are many ways of realising, asserting, and performing identity online. One of the methods I have chosen to explore is the selfie, a cultural phenomenon in our contemporary society. As a millennial, I have grown up taking selfies and exploring self-imaging practices. Because of this, and because of the prevalence of selfies that floods my social media feed, I thought it would be interesting to explore this phenomenon further in my creative practice as it relates to the expression of identity in cyberspace.

In 2013, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defined “selfie” as a photograph captured by oneself, usually taken using a smartphone, which is uploaded onto social media platforms. The Oxford English Dictionary selected “selfie” as word of the year in 2013, and the digital form of a self-portrait is still practiced daily.

However, selfies are not an entirely novel phenomenon. There are various stories tracing the history of selfies and growing research on the topic suggests many ways in which selfies are used and what they are. Selfies have an entangled relationship with the numerous forms of visual media that existed before it. The selfie is laden with feelings of nostalgia, harking back to amateur photographs found in family albums, or childhood activities that included drawing portraits of ourselves when learning to recognize our own bodies and reflections. The origin of the selfie is seen in art history and self-portraiture. The intriguing concept of a self-portrait has brought artists forward for centuries to experience the act of creating a likeness that was representative of an image of the self (Warfield 2014).

Like new media, the selfie can be thought of as a multimodal merging of old and new technology: the selfie can simultaneously be a mirror, camera, as well as a stage or billboard (Warfield 2014). This multi-faceted approach poses complications for research, as the researcher may wonder which lens to view this phenomenon from. Seeing a selfie as a

combination of various media forms that are already in existence, may give us further insight from which to form an analytical stance. The concept of a selfie being a mirror, camera and stage or billboard, all have aspects of self-reflection in them. If we were to analyse a selfie as a mirror, would we focus on ideas of cognition or perception? If we were to analyse a selfie as a camera, do we focus on the concept of the lens, history of photographic theory and art history? And if we were to analyse the selfie as a stage or billboard, do we view it as a performance, a communicative text or as an advertisement of sorts? These questions have brought forward interdisciplinary approaches in different fields of academia, including communication and sociology, cultural studies, film and media studies, as well as theatre studies (Warfield 2014).

In the definition of the selfie according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, two aspects are important to note. Katy Warfield (2014) describes this process as two-fold: firstly, the self-facing camera that is implied and secondly, the distribution of these images on social media platforms. These two correlations are what distinguishes selfies from previous forms of self-images and media. Until the introduction of digital photography, no other medium was able to show a person on a front-facing camera in real time. A mirror permits you to see yourself, but only a front-facing camera can record and document the image of your reflection. Smart phones, which have pivoting cameras, enables one to access a technology that becomes both a mirror as well as a visual recording tool. You can see the reflection of yourself moving on a screen in real time and at the perfect moment, capture your ideal self (Warfield 2014).

Research has been conducted to investigate the way selfies control the idea of fame (Marwick 2015) and how people profit from it (Abidin 2014). Other scholarship speaks of selfies and self-harm (Seko 2013); sexuality and selfies (Tiidenberg 2014; Gómez-Cruz & Miguel 2014); teenagers' use of selfies (Dobson 2014) and the changing idea of privacy (Lasén & Gómez-Cruz 2009). Perceptions range from selfies that present themselves as a form of digital self-exploration (Walker 2005) and identity (Avgitidou 2003); as therapeutic ways of reshaping individual experiences (Martin & Spence 2003) or as a means of constructing sociability and social hierarchies (Schwarz 2010). A prominent perspective aligns self-portraiture in fine arts to the practice of selfies (Warfield 2014). Other forms of research consider how the selfie is a "power-ambiguous or even an oppressive reinforcement of consumerist, hetero- and body-normative discourses that create a commodified even a 'docile' body" (Tiidenberg & Gómez-Cruz 2015:2).

On social media, selfie-taking practices, also known as a "self-imaging practice," (Faust 2017: 159) is where the person posting is simultaneously both the object and subject of the image.

This poses a challenge towards our established visual culture and perceived social order of image consumption and production. In contemporary self-imaging practices, the traditional role of image production that is usually dominated through a patriarchal lens, is challenged by female-identifying, non-binary, trans and other minority bodies. This type of research becomes important because, despite what feminist movements have achieved in bettering social equality, there is still an apparent ideal and practice that is exerted onto anybody that deviates from the norm (Faust 2017). Within the framework of my research, I look towards perspectives of the selfie that speak of agency and power within self-representation. Lee (2006) argues that selfies provide a way for women and queer individuals to gain control over their bodies. Visual self-representation on the internet can therefore be a way of increasing agency, power, and control (Koskela 2004; Walker 2005).

Many celebrities and microcelebrities' selfies and images circulate online and in the media. At the turn of the century, where mass media proliferated and the public first gained access to personal computers and camera phones, ordinary citizens were given the opportunity to participate in these spheres and publish pictures of themselves. When scrolling through social media platforms, it is common for users to post uncensored, erotic, or body-focused images of themselves. In an equivalent way that celebrities and icons do, many self-shooters copy (and mimic each other in that copying) from "codes of pornography in their self-presentation" (Gill 2008:39). As popular discourse dictates, these types of images may succumb to the ideology of the male gaze, in that the visual representation of our bodies serve the pleasures of a patriarchal system. However, many women and queer individuals say that their decision to represent themselves in an unrestricted way does not make them feel oppressed, but rather, liberated and empowered. Despite this, one must acknowledge that the person posting the image does not have control over the meaning or reaction generated by the public (Donaghue, Kurz & Whitehead 2011).

Global digital society functions in an image-centric culture. These images form a part of our daily and conditioned visual consumption of media. Due to the increase of online activity, the pervasiveness of these images plays a large role in how we construct and experience our world view (Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz 2015). Image-centred platforms such as *Instagram*, *Tumblr* and *TikTok* have an increasing amount of communication that occurs through images. The digital economy in our contemporary society 'remains profoundly ageist, (dis)ablest and heteronormative' (Gill 2009:189). This affects the way we see people – especially young women – see them themselves and begin to feel a sense of inadequacy and discontent (Lamb and Brown 2006; McRobbie 2009; Tolman 2012). Constantly mediating images of what society views as conventional beauty can fracture our own self-perception in which we either reject or

conform to these standards. Taking and posting selfies or engaging in self-imaging practices is a nuanced and negotiated practice that illustrates the tensions between the act of self-shooting, gender and body-image normative assumptions and the ecology of these photographs themselves. In a digital age where looking and being seen are practiced, as discussed in relation to John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972), this elucidates concerns of agency, power and control (Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz 2015).

I argue that cyberfeminism and post-structural feminism can be used as tools to carve out spaces for marginalized identities and create a platform for these bodies to be seen, heard and acknowledged as members of a global online community. My focus lies on the subjective experiences within digital media. I seek to look at what selfies are and the power they have online where "voyeurism and sexualized looking are permitted, indeed encouraged" (McNair 2002:ix). Harking back to analysing the gaze of the virtual *flâneuse* as the spectator-subject, *Instagram* thus creates a space where voyeurism is actively practiced as we view and consume the images that appear on our feed. This act of voyeurism is not only perceived as an external gaze onto the people we are looking at, but selfie-imaging practices focuses on an internal gaze when the shooter is aware of their own identity and asserts that on social media through sharing these portrait photographs.

In Figure 22, I conceptualise Katie Warfield's (2014) analysis of selfies through visualising a subjective experience of taking a mirror selfie. My material representation is distorted through different 'screens' as I see my own reflection in my phone's screen, and having this reflection refract and portrayed in a mirror. This moment of refraction is illustrated in the warped effect of the image, with an eye that replicates your own gaze onto these screens in order to see various versions of yourself in the same moment. The idea of having a warped self-portrait stems from our use of *filters* on *Instagram*, which alters the way we look through an augmented reality, creating multiple versions of ourselves on screen.

Warfield (2014) continues to note that the selfie is different from its earlier media predecessors, as the final product is not a captured image that remains in the confines of the private sphere. Rather, the selfie is constructed with the intention that it be shared on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram or WhatsApp. "And so, the selfie is different from a self-portrait or previous iterations of self-imaging because it is reflection and recording, public and private. It is a recordable mirror and a billboard" (Warfield 2014:1). From this quote, we begin to see the interdisciplinary nature of selfie-taking practices, which blurs the boundaries between private and public spheres. Many people believe that posting or trading selfies is self-consuming and vain, yet the relationship between subjectivity, self-

representation and selfie-taking practices is more complex than meets the eye. The considerations and process that is involved in taking a selfie is multi-layered. Through my practice-based research, I have sought to create pieces that speak of the relationship we have between our bodies and the idea of taking selfies to assert identity and reclaim space online.

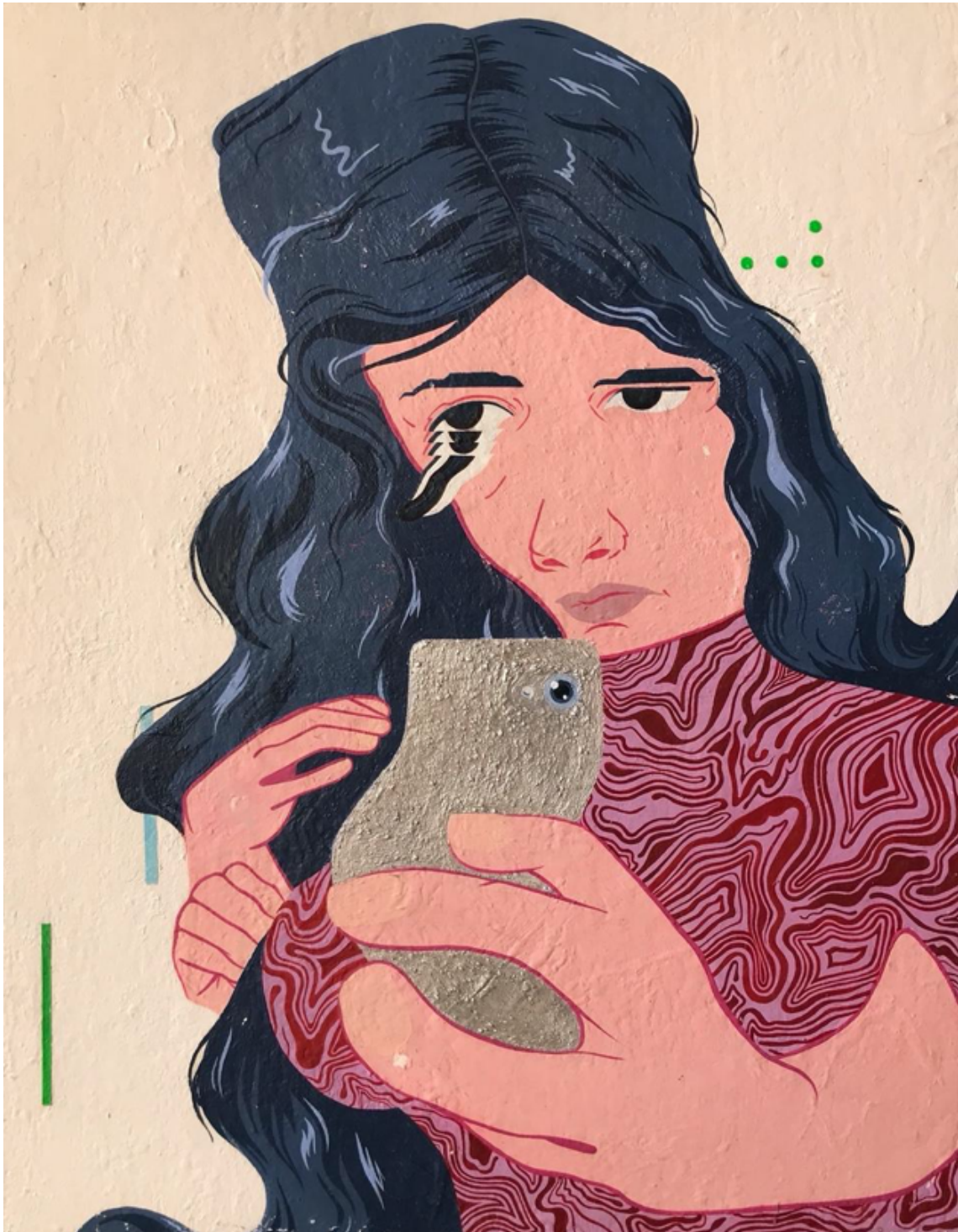


Fig 22: *Distorted Selfie*, 2021. Acrylic on wooden canvas. Mikhaila Coerecius.



Fig 23: *Virtual Self*, 2021. *Instagram* filter. Mikhaila Coerecius.

In Figure 23, I continue to explore the concept of distorted selfies through making my own filter on *Instagram* with the application Spark AR. As a virtual *flâneuse* travelling through the planes of cyberspace, I created a pixelated filter that emulates the movement through digital space. The filter, titled *Virtual Self*, layers multiple versions of the viewer on top of themselves, with a delayed feedback loop that creates a sense of movement as the colours and pixels overlap each other. The filter, which was published and is sharable on *Instagram*, has gained over 14 900 opens, 538 captures, 73 saves and 74 shares. These insights support my submission that *Instagram* can serve as a platform where women and queer individuals are able to share their creative practice with the public, echoing the philosophies of cyberfeminism and the virtual *flâneuse*.

Asserting identity online

The way in which many women choose to represent themselves online may incite criticism from conservative feminist critics. One of the main concerns of this criticism is the objectifying and sexualized heteronormative portrayal of the female body that manifests in the male gaze in the interest of male pleasure. A reason for this could be that the developing intersection between feminism and social media culture is multitudinous, intricate, and often conflicting

(Hamad & Taylor 2015:125). Rosalind Gill (2012) argues that there has been a noteworthy change in the representation of women in advertising and the media in recent years. Rather than women being cast as passive objects of the male gaze, women are now frequently portrayed as sexually empowered participants asserting their own agency and being involved in the construction of their own identities. Anita Harris (2005) asserts that many blogs, zines and websites function as liminal and marginal spaces where women and minority bodies can engage in an unconstrained dialogue. Examples of this are seen in the previous profiles mentioned such as @blazingnonbinary, @girlsagainstoppression, @sonkegenderjustice, @langaformen, @keeptheenergy and @protest_praxis. This enables the participants to produce their own meanings about their identity and their sense of agency.

When women and queer individuals are born, they are granted a limited space in a world controlled by men. Their social presence has evolved by the agency of their intelligence under the scrutiny and tuition of men in such a confined space. Referring to this space is not only a physical limitation, but a social and mental limitation too. The limitation of these spaces results in women and queer individuals having a dissected sense of self. This dissected sense of self is practiced in online spaces where one's identity can be portrayed in a myriad of ways. As a queer, cisgender woman of colour,²⁵ I am constantly aware of my identity as a woman and the societal norms attached to this. The relationship between my body and my gender is complex. Despite being in constant opposition towards the modes of patriarchy that is ascribed onto my body, there are moments where I accept and embrace my sense of femininity and the performance thereof, without regarding it as a service to patriarchy, but as a form of bodily empowerment.

Figure 24 represents the awareness of gender, the importance of language in identifying ourselves, and the idea of taking up space as a minority. In Figure 24 I focus on the use of gender self-identification on *Instagram* through words and iconography. Recent trends on *Instagram* suggests that one of the ways of showing solidarity to the LGBTGIA+ community is through the use of pronouns in our profile's biographies. As a queer, cisgender woman, my own preferred pronouns are she/her, as indicated in my own *Instagram* profile. If women and minorities are unable to occupy space in our physical reality, saturating cyberspace with the awareness of our identities may be a way of gaining agency. This form of digital empowerment creates instances of social impact, which has the potential to challenge current discourses on our ways of looking at others.

²⁵ The term *cisgender* refers to someone who's gender identity corresponds to their sex assigned at birth.

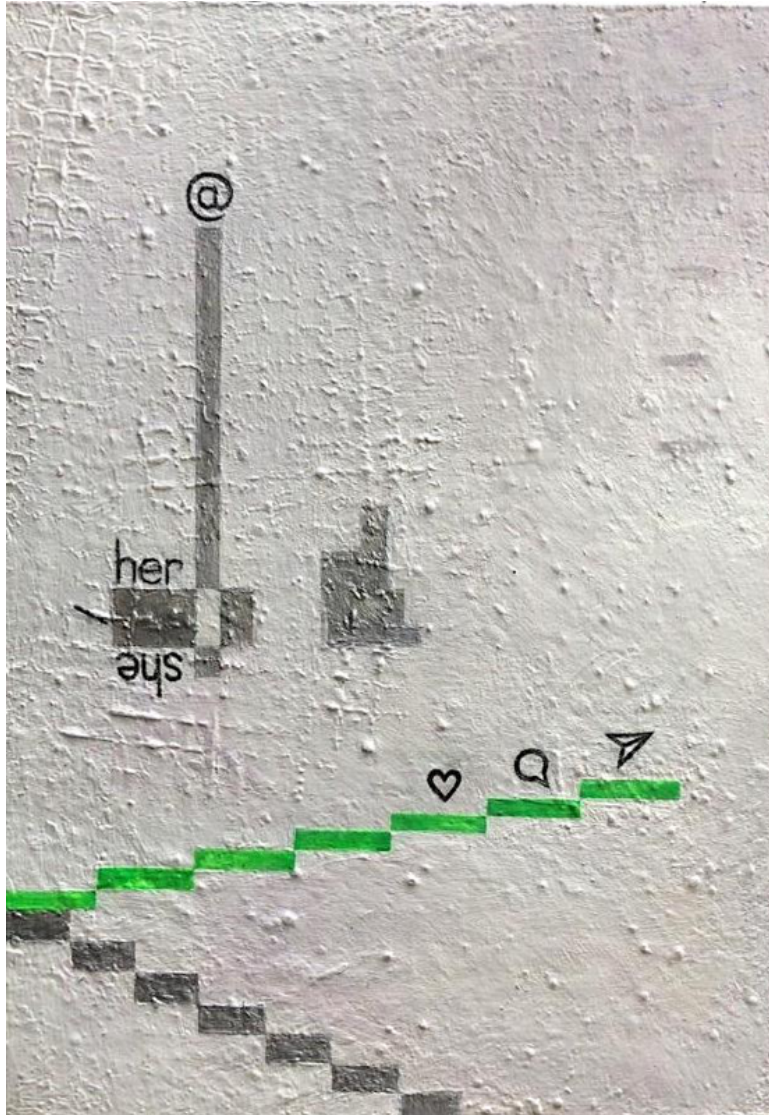


Fig 24: *Identity Online*, 2020. Mixed-media drawing on wooden canvas. Mikhaila Coerecius.

Social media becomes a mirror in which I constantly negotiate what I see in my reflection. A woman persistently watches herself as she is continually escorted by this image of herself. “From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually” (Berger 1972:46). Berger notes that a woman becomes the *surveyor* as well as the *surveyed* within herself. This concept is practiced in Fig 25, as reflective film is layered, removed, scratched and layered again, as a woman’s identity is in flux (Butler 1990) and is constantly negotiated when represented on screen. I continue the idea of selfies as a form of self-representation in the line drawing illustrating an idealised version of my own body, with the representation of a phone camera pointing towards the audience. The relationship between my identity as a woman and the perception of the public projected onto my body are two roles

that work in tandem and form an integral facet of a woman's identity. A woman surveys everything she does and everything she is because she is held hostage to her own perception in the eyes of others (Berger 1972:46). In Figure 25 I created the idea of a distorted hall of mirrors in a reflective material, describing the process surveying myself continuously either through mirrors or camera lenses.



Fig 25: *Hall of Mirrors*, 2021. Reflective film on wooden canvas. Mikhaila Coerecius.

The word 'survey' becomes prominent here, as a woman's existence is under a systematic analysis, not only by herself, but by the world. This point is relevant in relation to how women may use social media platforms and how they are perceived by the public. In many spaces on the internet, identity becomes the social currency of exchange; self-representation can become a powerful tool of asserting agency of the body. If, as a woman, I am inevitably bound by the male gaze within the context of social media, then I want the power to choose how I am looked at. Through having a choice in deciding how I portray and express myself, I gain a sense of agency in asserting my identity in cyberspace as a queer woman of colour.

Summary

In this chapter, I analysed how cyberspace can become a liberating platform that allows women and queer individuals to assert their identities through creative practices in *Instagram*. This chapter analysed various topics of the virtual *flâneuse*'s journey through cyberspace, including body politics and self-representation. Cyberspace presents endless possibilities of expressing identity in ways that public space is not always able to do. Through using the internet as a platform for agency and self-expression, women and queer individuals can exist within a virtual space on their own terms. Despite the dangers that are evident online, women and queer individuals continue subverting normative standards through creative and activist practices. Through focusing on self-shooting practices, I use methods of layering and distortion to practice the concept of intersectionality and self-representation online. Combatting the issue of gender-based violence in public space and cyberspace is not always possible, but that has not deterred these individuals from reclaiming their identity in these spaces.

CONCLUSION

In my research, I situated my practice in both public space and cyberspace with overarching themes of gender and identity being intersectional in these spaces. In Chapter One I positioned my practice-based research in public space through the context of gender-based violence in South Africa. I explored how the act of walking as a woman or queer individual is linked with the history of freedom in South Africa, impeded for too long through racial and gendered differences. However, in the context of my research, these differences are powerful. Layered in intersectionality and through theoretical frameworks such as post-structural feminism, one is able to understand and embrace layered identities within people. In my first chapter, I explored how walking movements that place women and queer individuals at the forefront show a sense of inclusivity as these identities stand together to protest systems of patriarchy and violence that prevents them from accessing public space safely and freely. This is shown in examples of activism and resistance such as the Women's March in 1956 and contemporary movements such as *Slut Walks* that were discussed in Chapter Two.

In Chapter Two I explored how women and queer individuals are able to reclaim public space through practices of walking, drawing and writing. I analysed case studies of women and queer artists who use walking, drawing and writing in their practice and layered these narratives with my own creative practice as the *flâneuse*. However, the patriarchal systems that continue to govern public space inhibits women and queer individuals from truly liberating themselves from these societal shackles. This can be seen in the continued growth rate of gender-based violence in South Africa. Despite women and queer individuals engaging in creative and activist practices in public space as a way to challenge the patriarchy, the incidences of sexism and gender-based violence has not decreased.

In Chapter Three, I situated my practice-based research in cyberspace, with *Instagram* serving as my main site of online inquiry. Feminist groups have facilitated a wider reach to the public by using cyberspace as a tool to educate and create awareness surrounding gendered discourses and the issues of gender-based violence in South Africa. Having a wide reach in South African society is not always possible through being in public spaces, but cyberspaces enable us to unify and inform in ways that might not be possible in public space. With the increase of internet activity in recent years, feminist groups have begun to engage in narrative practices which enable women and queer individuals' voices to be heard (Morgan 2016). Cyberspace provides a platform where people can perform and assert their gender and identity in limitless ways that may not be possible in public space. These narratives of gender and

identity can be seen in the personal experiences shared by women and queer individuals on platforms such as *Instagram*.

In my experience, my virtual body is an extension of my physical body and vice versa. My *Instagram* profile becomes the public persona of myself online. I treat *Instagram* as an online journal and it becomes a candid way of expressing myself to the world. Through seeing how other women and queer bodies express themselves in public space and cyberspace through personal narratives, I have responded and co-created through methods of walking drawing and writing. As social change happens through visibility, asserting one's identity as a woman or queer individual allows for others to see the ways in which they can reclaim space (Kippie 2019). In this context, the ability of social media platforms to make people visible to one another is significant. Similarly, based on my discussion of selfies, I argue that walking, drawing, and writing in virtual public space can facilitate space reclamation because it requires the active negotiation of a variety of dualisms (e.g. online/offline, public/private) and thus exercises the agency and taking control of how one performs and represents themselves in these different spaces.

The more that women and queer individuals crowd spaces on the internet with representations of themselves, the more they can fight against the patriarchal order that categorises people in set binaries. The internet is a tool for social change. The internet is a means to an end in claiming agency over one's body and identity. By seeing how other women and queer individuals used their own practices to express themselves, created a snowball effect in which I myself began to claim agency over my identity in both public and cyberspace. On my internet explorations as a virtual *flâneuse*, as well my explorations of walking, drawing and writing in public space, I have seen how alternative communities have formed; which embrace, discuss, educate, acknowledge and accept sexual difference and deviation from societal norms. The fact that walking/strolling/scrolling as a *flâneuse* in public and cyberspace becomes a subversive practice in which the individual can direct their gaze toward the very subjects that oppress their bodies in this space. Drawing can also create a process of embodying one's own gaze onto paper, thus facilitating a sense of agency in reclaiming space. In my creative process, sharing my work with the public through *Instagram* allowed me to connect and relate with other women and queer individuals whose identities are constantly shifting and in transformation.

In conclusion, as the ideologies of post-structural feminism and cyberfeminism maintain, we have multiple versions of ourselves; an intricate web of intersectional identities that exists in

different spaces. We have bodies, thoughts and feelings and we are only fighting to be considered equals, in both public space, and in cyberspace.

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