

Is Cindy Sherman's
Instagram account a
deconstructive post-
internet artwork on online
identity formation?



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Abstract

Cindy Sherman's Instagram account has gone public from the spring of 2017 while around the same time she started posting heavily edited selfies on there. These selfies were never officially stated part of her oeuvre but seem out of the ordinary in the context of a social medium. Through classical art historical analysis of Sherman's earlier works and theoretical research on their topics and methods it is possible to interpret her Instagram selfies as part of her oeuvre, as these topics seem applicable and relevant to them. The topics discussed within the analysis concern representational mechanisms in popular media; identity formation considering one's behavior setting; one's sense of reality; and Sherman's deconstructive working method. Concluding, this analysis forms a multi-layered deconstruction: on one hand it forms the established artist's behavior setting as it responds to certain expectations by interpreting new output by means of past output. Because of this, the analysis forms a demonstration of some of the topics analyzed in it, and it therefore also is a deconstruction of a deconstruction.

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Introduction

In the spring of 2017, renowned American-born artist Cindy Sherman (1954) turned her Instagram account from private to public.¹ At that point, the pictures on her account depicted a mixture of personal photos together with some clearly edited selfies. In the months following, Sherman started posting more selfies that have an even clearer and heavier edit to them: adding multiple filters to the photos, making her face look more deformed. Because of their over-the-top edit, these photos seem out of the ordinary within the context of a social media platform, where all its users tend to post realistic looking photos from their day-to-day lives. But without putting out an artist statement to go with it, Sherman left us questioning whether or not the content on her Instagram account could be considered part of her oeuvre.² It is not difficult to see the relevancy to her earlier works when we take a quick look at her Instagram content. As Sherman claimed a prominent spot in the modern art canon, she is well known for being interested and making works on subjects like identity formation, gender stereotyping and representational mechanisms in popular media. And so, her Instagram selfies, representing an over-edited Sherman herself on a medium that is most popular these days, seem to bear some resemblance to the aforementioned themes.

My own activity on Instagram made me stumble upon Sherman's account in the summer of 2017, witnessing her online activities at that very moment. Because of my interest in post-internet art and a familiarity I already had with Sherman's past works, I felt triggered finding out what is happening here, especially when seeing her selfies, that due to their edit and the fact that they're photos of Sherman herself, instantly seem to cohere to the themes within her oeuvre. I found that, besides some short articles in art magazines and more commercial newspapers, there haven't been any thorough academic writings on Sherman's Instagram account so far. Two of the found articles describe an interview their writers did with Sherman, explaining how the photos on her Instagram account came about and briefly going into the meaning behind her online activity. No comprehensive theoretical analysis was given, however.³ In a book about photography in digital culture Sherman's Instagram is given

¹ Instagram is a social platform on which its users can share their photos and videos.

² C. Elbaor, 'Cindy Sherman Just Made Her Instagram Account Public and It's Amazing', article on *Artnet News* <<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/cindy-sherman-instagram-1039676>> (14 January 2019).

³ A. Russeth, 'Facetime with Cindy Sherman: the Artist on Her "Selfie" Project for *W*, and What's Behind Her Celebrated Instagram', interview and article for *W Magazine* 2017 <<https://www.wmagazine.com/story/cindy-sherman-instagram-selfie>> (14 January 2019) and P. Sehgal, 'Cindy Sherman's New Self-Portraits Are Her First Pure Protagonists: Gloriously,

as an example considering the theme of the book.⁴ Here, Sherman's Instagram account is apparently acknowledged as 'official' photography, as the author of the book considers it photography in a digital environment. The text charges Sherman's Instagram content with art historical value, however the author doesn't elaborate on Sherman's case and the details of its art historical value. The writer of an article in the New York Times that was published just two weeks after Sherman turned her Instagram account public compared the Instagram selfies to some of Sherman's earlier projects and saw some similarities, but the article doesn't theoretically substantiate his observation.⁵ In addition, I did find a short article in which the author briefly discusses Sherman's Instagram account considering themes such as representational mechanisms, identity performance and reality.⁶ Nevertheless, a profound theoretical analysis remains absent within these texts and the existing discourse. That is why I decided to start forming a theoretical substantiation towards this subject myself. I want to do this by means of smaller research papers I wrote in the past in which I looked into concepts like identity creation and performance, where I theoretically defined the relationship between the screen, its content and the Instagram user, and where I studied the construction of spectatorship considering the viewpoint of the Instagram user looking at Sherman's Instagram account, considering Sherman's online activity a performance. Through these researches, I formed the basis of a theoretical background for interpreting Sherman's Instagram account as part of her artistic oeuvre, and that is why in this bachelor thesis I want to bring my findings together, go deeper into some aspects of it and provide a full theoretical analysis on Sherman's new visual content.

When setting the theoretical frame for this research, it is important to elaborate on the terms 'post-internet art', 'online identity formation' and 'deconstruction'. These three terms are part of my main research question, and thus form the basis for this research. My interest in post-internet art came forth out of an interest in internet art.

Catastrophically Themselves', interview and article for The New York Times Magazine 2018
<<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/10/05/magazine/instagram-cindy-sherman-ugly-beauty.html>> (14 January 2019).

⁴ W. Gerling, Holschbach S. and Löffler P., *Bilder Verteilen. Fotografische Praktiken in der digitalen Kultur*, Bielefeld 2018, p. 52.

⁵ J. Farrago, 'Cindy Sherman Takes Selfies (as Only She Could) on Instagram', interview and article for The New York Times
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/06/arts/design/cindy-sherman-instagram.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FSherman%2C%20Cindy&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics®ion=stream&module=stream_unit&version=search&contentPlacement=2&pgtype=collection> (14 January 2019).

⁶ D. Rubinstein, 'Techniques of The Self: On the art of Cindy Sherman', paper on Academia
<http://www.academia.edu/37055676/Techniques_of_The_Self_On_the_art_of_Cindy_Sherman_from_Untitled_Film_Stills_to_Instagram> (14 January 2019).

Hearing or reading about these terms and not knowing anything about them, you might think post-internet art acts as a reaction to internet art. The word 'post', however, merely indicates that this one thing came after the other. In this case, the word 'post' relates to the word 'internet', as opposed to relating to the couple of words 'internet art'. Post-internet art should therefore be understood as an art form of which its works reflect on society after the coming of the internet and in specific social media (also called the 'Web 2.0').⁷ The term therefore doesn't necessarily specify what medium or place its works are made in, it only tells us something about what topic a work contains.

An often occurring, overarching theme within post-internet art is how society is impacted by social media. The phenomenon of online identity creation falls within that theme and seems to be a popular subject amongst a lot of young contemporary artists. They are part of a generation of frequent social media users, and social media happens to relate strongly to the phenomenon of online identity creation: it offers its users the ability to construct their own online representation (and thus online identity) through its user-generated content structure.⁸ These artists experience the construction of their own online identity and witness that of others through social media, and study and reflect on the underlying structures that come with this phenomenon through their art. These underlying structures concern phenomena such as 'the gaze', framing, gender stereotyping and hyperreality.

Some of these artists choose a social media platform to be their art work's medium, using the layered structures to reflect on them, and thereby eventually analyzing what social media does to society. This working method is also known as a deconstructive way of working; a subversive affirmation; an embodied thought.⁹ A deconstructive work has a reflexive character on its subject's layered structures, it adopts the language of that which is being reflected on causing it to form a demonstration of the subject's structures, which in its turn exposes them. This way, structures get deconstructed, and at the same time it may even be an artist's way of criticizing the subject and its (underlying) structures.

⁷ O. Kholeif (ed.), *You Are Here. Art After the Internet*, Manchester/London 2015² (2014), p. 31.

⁸ The construction of the platform where users can generate and share their own content with other users.

⁹ I. Arns and S. Sasse, 'Subversive Affirmation. On Mimesis as a Strategy of Resistance', *Maska Performing Arts Journal* (2006), p. 445.

Using the theoretical frame mentioned above, I will explain how we can interpret Cindy Sherman's Instagram account as a deconstructive post-internet artwork on online identity formation. By looking at and getting to know her oeuvre; the themes she's been interested in throughout her life and career, and the theories that accompany these subjects, we might be able to see Sherman's Instagram content in a different light. By relating certain theoretical ideas to her oeuvre and interpreting it in and on a contemporary manner and context, we might be able to get a deeper understanding of what is behind these Instagram posts. This working method concerns the classical art historical research method, that reviews an artist's past work in order to interpret their new work. During this process I will do a complementary literary research for theoretical background. These methods will show how even in these shifting times it is still possible to use the past in order to interpret and understand the now.

Working with the classical art historical method, in the upcoming chapters I will have to get to know about Sherman's oeuvre's themes and subjects and see if I can relate these to her recent visual output: her Instagram content. These two steps in my analysis will form the two main chapters. I will, however, dedicate different subchapters to different themes and subjects and elaborate on them. Chapter 1 will begin with a general introduction on Sherman's earlier work and will then theoretically elaborate on a few of Sherman's series and works as representational case studies in order to understand the subjects she showed interest in throughout her career. In this chapter I will look at how we can find themes such as mechanisms of representation in popular media, gender theory, the emergence of hyperreality and the role of (popular) media in her work and I will also go in depth on Sherman's deconstructive working method. Chapter 2 will then contain a thorough analysis on Sherman's Instagram selfies. The chapter will start off by (visually) introducing Sherman's selfies, as well as elaborating on how Sherman started posting them online. I will then examine whether or not the subjects and theoretical background from her body of work that were elaborated on in chapter 1 are applicable in a contemporary context: her Instagram content. In a final chapter I will try to conclude and formulate an answer on my main research question, elaborate on what more there could or is to be done concerning research on this subject, and with that, suggest possible follow-up research questions.

CH 1: An introduction to Cindy Sherman and her oeuvre

With multiple awards to her name and being named in probably every modern Western art history overview book, Sherman is one of the most known and appreciated American feminist artists of the 20th and 21st century.¹⁰ She was born in a Long Island family of five, alongside three older brothers. Growing up in the late 1950's her childhood was filled with watching television: learning of the things happening in the world through the viewpoint of these television makers, including clearly charged social and sexual roles.¹¹ Being artistically active from the 1970's to present day, her body of work is a large one, mainly consisting of conceptual photographs, and it shows clear overarching themes and concepts. In earlier projects she had photographed herself as different sorts of dolls and made a collage of storyboard images of herself as different types of cinematographic characters.¹² These, from the beginning on, expressed her interest in the social and sexual roles in television and cinema, which were the most popular media throughout her youth and adolescence. The photo series that resulted in her break through is called the *Untitled Films Stills (1977-1980)*, through which she researched how cinema created and depicted certain social and sexual roles for women. The *Untitled Film Stills* series seem to have set the tone for the rest of Sherman's oeuvre, as her later projects in a sense all concerned woman's imposed social and sexual roles in popular media. For that reason it is essential to thoroughly analyze the *Untitled Film Stills* series, after which her later projects will also be analyzed briefly.

Untitled Film Stills (1977-1980)

For the *Untitled Film Stills* series, Sherman took direct inspiration from cinema's visual language, alongside that of television shows and commercials from the 1950's and 60's. She appropriated this visual language by creating photos that look like film stills, depicting "the most artificial-looking kinds of women": those kinds of women we (women) are all taught to desire, to want to be.¹³ When doing this, Sherman dressed up and modelled for all the photos herself, portraying a different stereotypical woman derived from these well-known cinematographic narratives in each photo. Her

¹⁰ C. Morris, *The Essential. Cindy Sherman*, New York 1999, pp. 9 and 40.

¹¹ Morris 1999 (see footnote 10), pp. 17-21.

¹² Morris 1999 (see footnote 10), pp. 29-33.

¹³ Morris 1999 (see footnote 10), p. 37.

behavioral decisions and body language, her hair, makeup and clothes: they all were in function of playing a certain role. Sherman managed to transform into a different woman in each photo, all with a seemingly different story to them, even though in reality they are played out by one and the same woman. By doing this, Sherman showed how femininity is a construct: “She showed not an image of a woman, but a woman-as-image”.¹⁴



From top to bottom, left to right: Fig. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #3*, *Untitled Film Still #2*, *Untitled Film Still #10*, *Untitled Film Still #21*, *Untitled Film Still #13*, *Untitled Film Still #35*, 1977, 1977, 1978, 1978, 1978, 1979.

With her *Untitled Film Stills* Sherman clarified that this image women try to become derives from cinema. Because of the uprising of photography and technical reproducibility, images of women were being mass produced on a never before seen scale from the 50’s onwards. It being the most modern and popular medium of the time, cinema played a big part in the distribution of these images during the 70’s and 80’s. They seemed relatively realistic, as for the first time in modern media they were

¹⁴ J. Loughery, 'Reviewed work: Cindy Sherman: *Untitled Film Stills* by Arthur Danto', *Woman's Art Journal* 12 (1991) 1, pp. 56-57.

images of real women, not drawn or painted. Images of women in popular media throughout history namely often concerned paintings, which in old art mostly regarded mythological or biblical figures and, however very realistically painted, were often not adjacent to reality.¹⁵ Peter Paul Rubens, for example, portrayed the ideal woman in his painting when visualizing his version of the story of Paris' judgment (fig. 7): a Greek myth about a young Trojan prince named Paris who gets to choose who of the three most beautiful goddesses gets the prize of a golden apple addressed to "the Fairest". These women, so realistically painted, but also part a mythological story, were literally considered gods; the most beautiful; the most feminine; the most ideal. In 1826 the camera obscura was invented, and it wasn't until 1871 that silver gelatin photography was invented, which formed the beginning of photography as we now know it. During this period, artists still mostly visualized their women through painting, as photography wasn't very widespread yet. They did however paint their women in a more modern setting than before. Édouard Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (fig. 8) that was made in 1862, for example, pictured a scene of modern life and was thus considered quite realistic during that time.¹⁶



Fig. 7: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris*, 1638-1639.



Fig. 8: Édouard Manet, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, 1862.

As photography got more popular and succeeded (the most) in picturing something as close to reality as possible, modern painters started to look for other ways to visualize reality and to excel in other aspects other than emulating life as

¹⁵ I. Goetz, K. Löffelmann and C. Sherman (red.), *Cindy Sherman*, exh.cat. Munich (Sammlung Goetz) 2015, p. 131.

¹⁶ H. Arnason and E. Mansfield, *History of Modern Art. Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Photography*, London 2012⁷ (1968), p. 24.

realistically as possible. Over time, this resulted in works like Georges Seurat's *Le Chahut*, made in 1889 (fig. 9): a work that through its pointillist technique tempted to experiment with light and color, while at the same time forming Seurat's very personal painterly expression.¹⁷ Or Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*, that was created in 1907 (fig. 10). This work depicts five women all in different poses and each (of their body parts) in different compositions or viewpoints, painted in a style called Cubism. For Picasso, this expressive way of painting was literally an obliteration of the lessons from his past.¹⁸ And although this painting's subject was considered quite realistic to most as prostitution had earned a prominent place in avant-garde art at that time, the depiction of Picasso's women was in the literal sense very far from realistic.

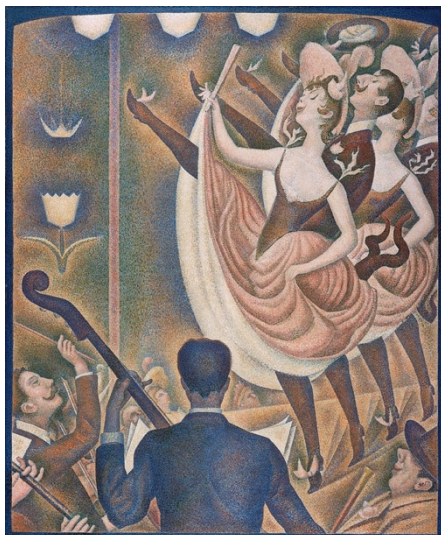


Fig. 9: George Seurat, *Le Chahut*, 1889-1990.



Fig. 10: Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*, 1907.

It was not until the 1920's and 30's that artists started experimenting with photography and thus the depiction of women started to become more realistic in form.¹⁹ Man Ray, for example, picked up the camera often for side projects in order to support himself financially. He made fashion photographs, like *Observatory Time: The Lovers* (fig. 11) that was based on a painting of his so-called *Observatory Time*, in front of which lied a fully dressed woman for a 1936 spread in fashion magazine Harper's Bazaar.²⁰ Here, because of use of the medium of photography, the depiction of the woman figure is a

¹⁷ Arnason and Mansfield 2012 (see footnote 16), pp. 44-45.

¹⁸ Arnason and Mansfield 2012 (see footnote 16), p. 142.

¹⁹ Arnason and Mansfield 2012 (see footnote 16), p. 331.

²⁰ J. Mundy, *Man Ray. Writings on Art*, Los Angeles 2016, p. 130.

seemingly realistic one. It was during these times that cinema exploded as well, and the widespread depiction of women in popular modern media seemed more realistic than they ever were before. In a sense they were: the images that were widely spread were, in form, as close to reality as possible. However, works like that of Sherman investigate and elaborate on the representational mechanisms of these popular media, and show that the term 'realism' can imply more than just the visual aspect of it.²¹

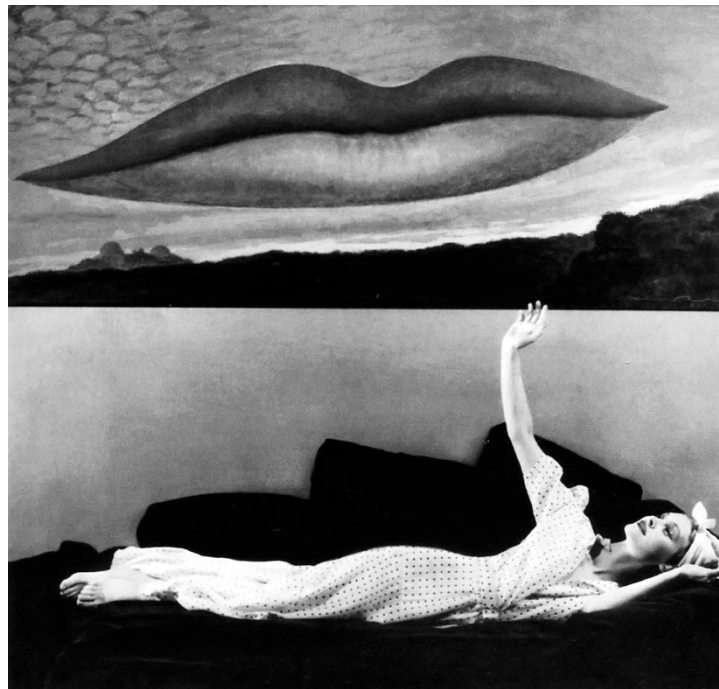


Fig. 11: Man Ray, *Observatory Time: The Lovers*, 1936.

Sherman wasn't very conscious of feminist theories at the time she made her first known series. She had been dressing up as a young girl, transforming herself into different characters each time. She had always been a fan of vintage shopping, integrating clothing items into her own invention of their possible previous owners.²² She then often dressed up in public as well, saying it was a form of anti-depressant to her, or she just found it entertaining. In hindsight, we could say, she showed how femininity is an ongoing masquerade, or even a constant performance. This personal observation was also shown through her photographic work: being a young woman coming from a Western capitalist culture and trying to fulfill certain expectations people

²¹ Goetz, Löckemann and Sherman 2015 (see footnote 15), p. 164.

²² Morris 1999 (see footnote 10), p. 28.

had of her. She was trying to achieve the ideal image of how a young woman should be; how she should dress; how she should act, while at the same time feeling stuck, as she realized this ideal image is unrealistic and unachievable.²³ She said she felt that the women in her photos (Sherman never felt like she photographed herself) were struggling with something as well, feeling that they were being forced into acting a certain role: roles that are in and from a film.²⁴

As cinema (and most media) has since the beginning been dominated by male producers, women have always been portrayed through something called the 'male gaze': observed as it is implicated in the power relations between observer and observed, which in the case of a male gaze means the portrayals show women that measure up to a certain ideal image of how a man would most prefer to see a woman. As to be seen in the beforementioned art historical examples: all producers were men and we can see certain male to female power relations in all of the art works. The woman is one to be looked at, often naked and objectified, subject to men or focused on their appearance and therefore in function of commercialism. The male produced image of woman is often overly feminine and forms an ideal that the public (women) eventually tries to live up to. The phenomenon of managing your own identity and personality in order to live up to a certain ideal is described by Erving Goffman (1922) as 'impression management'. Goffman herewith described life as a stage where the individual presents an idealized version of themselves by means of certain activities (or a performance you could say) formed by a conscious selection of personal details that the individual feels comfortable showing as they fit in the ideal image that they're trying to reach.²⁵ This phenomenon of a conscious selection of personal details was first described by French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913) in his 'narrative identity' theory. This theory doesn't go very much in depth about why exactly people prefer whether or not to reveal certain personal information: Ricoeur speaks more of the fact that people indeed do make a conscious selection through which they curate and thereby create their own identity. He calls this a 'narrative identity'. According to Goffman, the ideal image that people tend to live up to by means of their impression management and narrative identity is formed by their surroundings, or 'behavior setting'.²⁶ The term 'behavior setting' implies that people's behavior is determined by

²³ Goetz, Löckemann and Sherman 2015 (see footnote 15), pp. 53 and 128.

²⁴ B. Schwabsky, *Cindy Sherman. The Complete Untitled Film Stills*, exh.cat. New York (Museum of Modern Art) 1997, p. 9.

²⁵ E. Goffman, *Presentation of self in everyday life*, New York 1990, p. 22.

²⁶ Goffman 1990 (see footnote 25), p. 4.

the prevailing norms and goals of their surroundings, their setting.²⁷ According to Ricoeur and Goffman, the establishment of identity consists of a series of acts. Like Ricoeur and Goffman, Judith Butler (1956) claims that identity is an ongoing process rather than a vast state of being, as this beforementioned series of acts is ongoing as well. Butler, however, claims in her theory on gender performativity, that identity gets established retroactively, as the performer is always trying to act out a certain image that measures up to the behavior setting, wanting to realize it but in reality never achieving the goal as this ideal image is always a step further: unreachable because of how unrealistic it actually is.²⁸

As popular media form a big part of people's surroundings, their content plays a big part in creating people's behavior setting. Film theorist Laura Mulvey (1941) and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901) claimed that to women cinema functions as a mirror, where they see an idealized and most wanted version of themselves and to which they thus compare themselves. Media are, in this sense, a shaper. They form our frame of reference, our sense of reality, our behavior setting. The creation of people's behavior setting always happens by means of a certain gaze prevailing in their surroundings and this gaze influences people's behavior and sense of reality in its turn.²⁹ This way, (individuals in) society will produce representations by behaving a certain way, determined by and based on representations that come from the behavior setting and thus prevailing gaze in and of popular media, amongst others. These representations are often not representative, as they are based on the gaze that is implicated with power relations and often unrealistic ideals. This process eventually results in what Jean Baudrillard (1929) calls a 'hyperreality'. Our sense of reality is then based on something unrealistic, which makes it and everything that derives from this sense of reality unrealistic as it, as well, derived from something unrealistic.³⁰ In this sense, Sherman's *Untitled Film Still* personas seem to be striving for an ideal image that is hyperreal: not based on a realistic and representative reality, but on a mere male gazed dream. Secondly it seems that Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* can make one aware of the fact that their sense of reality may be different from that of others. Sherman's characters' expressions and body language often insinuate that

²⁷ B. Hogan, 'The Presentation of Self in the Age of Social Media: Distinguishing Performances and Exhibitions Online', *Sage* 30 (2010) 6, pp. 378-379 and P. Hesselberth, 'Between Infinity and Ubiquity: Perspectives in/on Rafael Lozano Hemmer's Body Movies', *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 27 (2013) 4, p. 588.

²⁸ J. Rak, Poletti, A., *Identity Technologies. Constructing the Self Online*, Madison WI 2013, p. 56.

²⁹ P. Hodkinson. *Media, Culture and Society. An Introduction*, Los Angeles 2017, p. 80.

³⁰ Hodkinson 2017 (see footnote 29), p. 269.

they are the object of someone's gaze, and that something is going on, something that is not visible within the frame. Obvious clues are left out and the spectator is left guessing, needing to appeal to their own interpretive ability. Sherman leaves her works open for interpretation and viewers' own associations. These associations are defined by cultural background, which, amongst others, is defined by their behavior setting. By appealing to the 'myth', as art historian Rosalind Krauss (1941) called it, Sherman "de-myth-ifies" it.³¹ The 'myth' here referring to the hyperreal: something reconstructed that is brought and understood as universal truth only because it is tradition. Krauss here essentially points out Sherman's deconstructive working method concerning an unrealistic reality. This method is also described as subversive affirmation or an 'embodied thought': the work acquires a reflexive character as it adopts the language of that which is being criticized in order to at the same time form a demonstration of just that.³² Sherman does this by emulating film stills in order to expose their social and sexual structures. By carrying out these structures in her work, it exposes and deconstructs them. Her deconstructive way of working is, in art historical perspective, very fitting for her time, where artists challenge the modern idea of creative originality by appropriating images from the media. Appropriation to this generation of artists (called post-Modernists) is a means of exposing structures through demonstration and illustration, and therefore deconstructing them.³³ Doing this, Sherman showed how photography, and film as well, don't necessarily show the most realistic representation of reality, as opposed to the general mindset that prevailed during the coming and more widespread uprising of photography.

Sherman's next series, called the *Rear Screen Projections*, were made around the beginning of the 1980's, where she used rear-screen projections in her studio to make colored photographs of herself again as different types of female characters, this time more confident and independent. Their starting points are television shows from the 1960's and 70's. In these years, Sherman also started to get assigned more commercial projects, like making horizontal two-page centerfolds for art magazine *Artforum* (fig. 12, 13 and 14). Here, she once again photographed herself as different female characters, lying or crouched down on the floor, referring to the visual language

³¹ R.E. Krauss, *Bachelors*, Cambridge 2000, p. 110.

³² Arns and Sasse 2006 (see footnote 9), p. 445.

³³ Morris 1999 (see footnote 10), p. 48.

of photo spreads from pornographic magazines. The aspect of voyeurism is once again very clearly present, as Sherman framed herself from above, the spectator is looking down on her. Combined with her vulnerable look, Sherman here plays with often occurring associations of female sexuality and sensuality in combination with vulnerability.³⁴ And just like her earlier work, Sherman leaves out obvious clues for what might have happened to these young women, leaving the possibility for the spectator to interpret the images themselves.



Fig. 12: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #85*, 1981.



Fig. 13: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #94*, 1981.



Fig. 14: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #93*, 1981.

A year later, mainly due to criticism on her vulnerable pornographic-like characters, Sherman moves on to seemingly more “realistic” imagery, where she photographs herself without makeup, wigs, or other props. She makes the works vertical, in order to take away the vulnerability of her characters that was implied by the horizontality of her works. Her new images, also named *Pink Robes* (fig. 15), show other moments of the lives of her pornographic centerfold models, being their “real” backstage selves. But Sherman’s



Fig. 15: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #97*, 1982.

³⁴ A. Cruz, E. Smith and A. Jones, *Retrospective*, exh. cat. London (The Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles and Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago) 1997, p. 6.

use of dramatic theatrical lighting we could say once again refers to woman's constant performance being a woman that takes place even during those seemingly off-stage moments. In her following series of photographs called the *Color Tests*, Sherman goes a step further and decides to photograph herself in a most natural state possible, though experimenting even more with theatrical colored lighting. In these images a reference to popular media is not present. They seem to however be made in the same spirit as her previous projects: questioning people's concept of reality.

From 1983 onwards, Sherman started getting assigned for fashion photography projects, from jobs for more local fashion magazines to high-end designers like Jean-Paul Gaultier and Comme des Garçons.³⁵ An interesting combination of parties, as these assignments are commercial in nature: they often pick up on stereotypical sexual roles in order to sell their product. This way of advertising is also called the 'two-step flow theory', where a product is put in the context of the ideal image, often combined with a so called representative person who people look up to, as they most fit the ideal image of the general behavior setting.³⁶ This way, the public (unconsciously) associates the product with the ideal image, which makes them attach a certain symbolical value to the product, even when it's just another mass product. The product's value is in this case thus not intrinsic but is defined by the product's context. The symbolical value the public attaches to the product results in a 'false need': the consumer is convinced they need this product in order to form their identity



Fig. 16: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #132*, 1984.

and image in a way so that it comes as close to their ideal image as possible.³⁷ Products that influence one's image are in this sense part of one's impression management, too. And as products play a crucial role in one's impression management, one's identity has become something that is visually expressible. Practically speaking, measuring up to the ideal image is an unachievable dream, as this means one would always have to be on the most recent trends.³⁸ On the other hand, the ideal image itself remains an unrealistic and unreachable image as well, an illusion, as it is often created by an unrepresentative gaze. The fact that these ideal images

³⁵ Cruz, Smith and Jones 1997 (see footnote 34), p. 8.

³⁶ Hodkinson 2017 (see footnote 29), pp. 82 and 190.

³⁷ Hodkinson 2017 (see footnote 29), pp. 102, 164 and 165.

³⁸ Cruz, Smith and Jones 1997 (see footnote 34), p. 8.

seem realistic lies in consequence of the media that want to make it seem realistic, for consumers to keep aiming for the ideal, to keep consuming and spending money. This “metamorphosis through consumption” forms the “myth of modern culture”, making the lives of the wealthy seem glamorous and desirable.³⁹ These concepts of course stand close to Sherman’s interest in the ideal feminine image that is created by popular media like cinema and television, an interest she expressed throughout her earlier works. Sherman responded on the commerciality of fashion and their use of the ideal image by creating the opposite of their usually glamorous ads. The characters she depicted in these photos looked silly and laughable, sometimes even sinister. In an assignment that followed for the French Vogue, Sherman took on a more sinister tone, depicting characters with wrinkled, burnt-like faces and an almost manic glance in their eyes (fig. 16). Here, by showing images that are opposite to the often shown ideal that circulates in mass media, Sherman accentuates our Western way of thinking of the importance of bodily control and physical perfectionism.⁴⁰

In the years following, Sherman turned her work to a less dark corner and started to work more towards the fantastical, imaginative. From 1985 onwards, Sherman completely left behind the realistic scenery in her depictions. She abandoned the real, trading it for a world of dark grotesque fairytales and fables, depicting wounded human pigs in the dark and deranged and possessed-looking characters (responding to the stereotype of the crazy woman) placed in unpredictable situations (fig. 17 and 18). To her these works related to how she felt as a young child when reading these imaginative



From left to right: fig. 17 and 18. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #153*, *Untitled #140*, both from 1982.

stories: always wanting the things to happen she knew weren’t good or happy. Like when one is watching a horror movie, holding their hands before their eyes, but still peeking through their fingers. Things that are normally seen as grotesque or ugly, Sherman finds fascinating. One of the reasons for Sherman falling back on the stories she read as a young child, is that this genre formed one of her (and many other kids’)

³⁹ Cruz, Smith and Jones 1997 (see footnote 34), p. 3.

⁴⁰ Cruz, Smith and Jones 1997 (see footnote 34), p. 10.

first encounters with certain assumptions about the world. It is these stories that have the first type of impact on a young child's frame of reference and sense of reality, and from the beginning on, it is filled with social and sexual roles. Later projects take on a more gruesome tone once again, until she finally removes herself from her own frame and uses mutilated dolls as the subjects in her photos. These photos depict "toys that do not look like toys at all": they are laid in the dark surroundings of garbage piles, with lipstick smeared all over their face, noses as belly buttons and devilish expressions to them (fig. 19, 20 and 21).⁴¹



From left to right: fig. 19, 20, 21. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #155*, *Untitled #187*, *Untitled #188*, 1985, 1989, 1989.

Her then following *History Portraits* series formed a parody on the Western art historical canon, that contains a representational system just as much as more modern media do. In 1992 Sherman continued on to make pornographic tinted work, depicting

Fig. 22: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #311*, 1994.



dolls that show their genitals by means of pornographic poses. Through these works Sherman tended to ridicule pornography, using artificial dolls, possibly to objectify the thing that itself objectifies (women). Maybe it was Sherman's goal to, though a certain humor and ridicule, emphasize the existence of this objectification.

Sherman turned back to horror in the years from 1994 to 1996 by means of her *Horror and Surrealist Pictures*. Here, she started experimenting more with different photographic techniques like double

⁴¹ Cruz, Smith and Jones 1997 (see footnote 34), p. 145.

exposure to manipulate her images (fig. 22).⁴² Sherman's interest in the technical manipulation of images as opposed to manipulation in terms of mutilating objects in order to emphasize their artificiality, we could say forms a bridge towards Sherman's contemporary way of counteracting the ideal image, which will be discussed later on in this analysis.

After some years Sherman came back with a series called *Clowns* made in 2003 to 2004 (fig. 23, 24, 25, 26 and 27). The series fully exists of portraits of Sherman dressed as different types of clowns in front of a digital background: from the well-known happy and sad ones, to more laconic, melancholic and even nightmare-worthy lunatic ones. As these clowns show a wide variety of intense emotion, Sherman wanted to show how there's always a complex person in between and behind the well-known stereotypes.⁴³ The *Clowns* series emphasize the contrasting given of the artificial surface versus the real and layered person underneath. Sherman's clowns at the same time act as a metaphor for the artist of who society expects to be entertaining, to behave outside of the norms.



From top to bottom, left to right: fig. 23, 24, 25, 26, 27. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #425*, *Untitled #412*, *Untitled #422*, *Untitled #419*, *Untitled #411*, 2004, 2005, 2004, 2004, 2003.

⁴² Cruz, Smith and Jones 1997 (see footnote 34), pp. 14-15.

⁴³ E. Respini, J. Burton and J. Waters, *Cindy Sherman*, exh.cat. New York (Museum of Modern Art) 2012, pp. 45-47.

In 2008, Sherman published her *Society Portraits*, for which she photographed herself as different older women with money and status; women who seem to have made it in life (fig. 28). With their makeup layered turkey necks and cosmetically smooth foreheads, these women clearly are struggling to keep up with society's beauty standards, trying to look as perfect as they can, however always unfulfilled and unhappy from within. These photos, just as her *Clowns* photos did, show the contrast between people's artificial happy looking surface and their inner unhappiness. They also question: what do we still know is real when we almost can't tell by the eye?



Fig. 28: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #474*, 2008.

In the years upcoming Sherman started experimenting more with digital editing programs like Photoshop, transforming her own face in order to depict day-to-day characters who have something odd to them, dressed in almost heroic-like outfits (fig. 29). Here we see a shift in Sherman's work, as she deviates from the depiction of the stereotype. These characters (an old lady with her head scarf; a young androgynous looking gamer girl; a middle-aged very normal looking brown-haired lady) fit within, but also in between all stereotypes in some way: they refer to the versatile range of roles society expects of women.⁴⁴ For another project Sherman photographed herself without makeup but with a slightly Photoshopped face, dressed fully in *haute couture* clothing, with majestic landscape backgrounds (fig. 30).⁴⁵ As Sherman's interest and use of digital editing programs increased, her artistic work tends to emphasize the contrast of the artificial surface and the genuine psyche.



From left to right: fig. 29 and 30. Cindy Sherman, mural within the Cindy Sherman exhibition at Gallery of Modern Art Queensland, *Untitled #512*, both from 2010.

⁴⁴ Respini, Burton and Waters 2012 (see footnote 43), pp. 48-49.

⁴⁵ Respini, Burton and Waters 2012 (see footnote 43), p. 49.

However different in method, props and style, throughout her body of work Sherman has always implicated aspects of society's culture and the role of women in it. On one hand by appropriating the ideal image and therefore deconstructing it, on the other hand by undermining this desirable image and emphasizing its artificiality. Her later works take on a more critical note, showing what's behind the ideal image. Throughout her work, Sherman never seemed to loudly comment on any societal topics herself, but she did make her public aware and opened up the possibility for conversation and debate.

CH 2: An analysis of Cindy Sherman's Instagram account

Knowing and theoretically understanding what Sherman's main interests were in her earlier works, we can now try to see if these themes and motives could be applicable to her Instagram account. Sherman created her account in October of 2016, naming it 'misterfriedas_mom', honoring her pet parrot.⁴⁶ In the beginning period of her Instagram account, she mainly posted photos depicting things she did on trips, food she ate and events she attended. Having posted only personal photos like the beforementioned, Sherman posted her first edited selfie on May 12th of 2017, including the caption "Selfie! No filter, hahaha". Sherman soon started posting edited selfies more often, making them more deformed and distorted by the post. These photos depict extremely clownish self-portraits and are definitely out of the ordinary when it comes to selfies on Instagram. Her Instagram content can make us wonder: why is she posting these heavily edited selfies?⁴⁷

The upcoming chapter will put Sherman's Instagram content in the (theoretical) context of her oeuvre, to show that Sherman posting these selfies could be seen as a logical addition to her body of work. In this analysis, I will for the most part discuss her selfies as they form the main facet of her content that seems out of the ordinary in Instagram's context, and therefore her selfies will be most informative on Sherman's Instagram activity. Together with a visual analysis I will then theoretically analyze the selfies by going in on the beforementioned themes from Sherman's oeuvre: from

⁴⁶ Farrago 2017 (see footnote 5).

⁴⁷ From my own research paper for the course Playful Media Cultures at Utrecht University, November 2017.

representational mechanisms and the deconstruction of stereotypes to people's sense of reality.

Cindy's Selfies

The first selfie Sherman posted on her Instagram account depicts a self-portrait where one can clearly see there has been technical alteration: Sherman's eyes are minimized and the portrait includes a vague blur that is visible on multiple parts of her face and hair (fig. 31). The next selfie Sherman posted (only a day later) contains an even more clearly visible alternation: with Sherman's nose extremely thinned out and her eyes and lips enlarged (fig. 32). The caption to this post reads: "New app Facetune. #notyourusualselfie". The caption clarifies the likelihood that Sherman is up to something at this point: she's not just posting your average funny-looking selfies. Her next selfie, that was posted just another day later, contains a clear filter over all of the photo, making it a little higher in contrast and saturation, besides her eyes and nose that are once again digitally altered in shape (fig. 33).



From left to right: fig. 31, 32, 33. Cindy Sherman, *Selfie! No filter, hahaha, New app Facetune. #notyourusualselfie, Back from the gym!*, all from 2017.

The selfies Sherman posted when her Instagram account just turned public clearly got more digitally altered by the post, as if she had been experimenting with contemporary technical manipulation at that very moment: trying out new filters and exploring the boundaries of digital alteration on a smartphone. An experimental phase

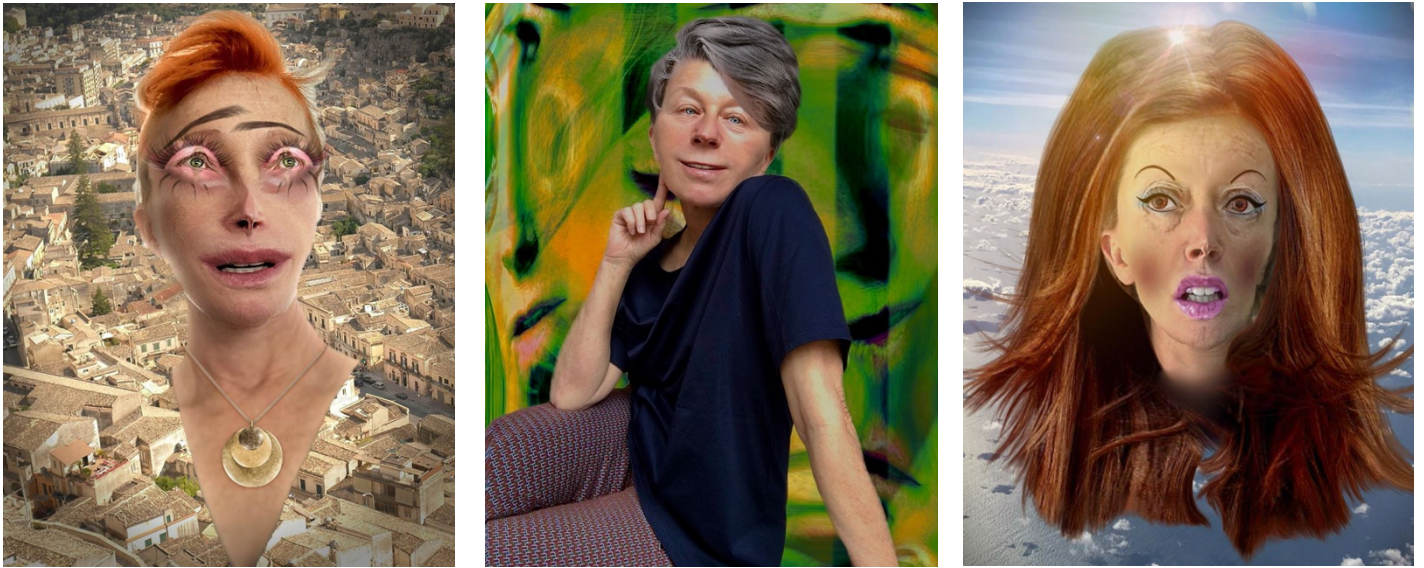
like this seems to work out best for Sherman when she is her own model: not hurried, in control of the situation and being able to steer and carry out her own process.⁴⁸ This is where we can find a first similarity between her earlier works and her Instagram selfies. She once again only uses herself as her model: offline in her photographs, now online on Instagram. Where Sherman made her point through only using herself as her model, yet always managing to depict a different stereotypical character, she seems to do the same in her Instagram selfies. These selfies, to her, are not regular selfies: they are portraits of ordinary people, Instagram users like her, who also sometimes post selfies.⁴⁹ This tells us that Sherman practically approves for these photos to be interpreted within the context of her oeuvre: she tells us these are not portraits of Cindy, these are portraits of others, and they thus form yet another reflexive body of work, in line with the rest of her oeuvre. Besides the fact that Sherman tells us these aren't selfies of herself, another reason as to how these selfies differ from the 'regular' Instagram selfie is the fact that they are very heavily edited through editing apps like *FaceTune*, *Perfect365* and *YouCam Makeup*.⁵⁰ Using these apps for the edit of selfies on Instagram isn't out of the ordinary either, however. These apps were made to perfect one's selfies, to help them come closer to the prevailing ideal image: to just add that slight blush to the cheek or make those little lines and wrinkles go away. Sherman, however, seems to have heavily overused these apps, turning her selfies into estranged half-digitalized portraits of different characters that look almost comical. This working method is also described as 'over-identification'.⁵¹ In Sherman's case, this means that what is needed for the prevailing ideal image is made visible to an extreme by means of overusage of editing apps. By doing this, Sherman shows the presence of digital manipulation in Instagram, creating awareness and perhaps causing other social media users to recognize it in their own online environments. This creation of awareness forms an important sociological aspect of Sherman's work, as social media users often believe that the day-to-day content they see on platforms like Instagram is authentic and forms a true representation of reality.

⁴⁸ Sehgal 2018 (see footnote 3).

⁴⁹ Sehgal 2018 (see footnote 3).

⁵⁰ Russeth 2017 (see footnote 3).

⁵¹ Arns and Sasse 2006 (see footnote 9), p. 448.



From left to right: fig. 34, 35, 36. Cindy Sherman, *Blending in*, *Hear no, speak no evil...haha*, *Windy day*, all from 2018.

Social media play a big part in people's lives due to frequent use of smartphones and an almost everlasting connection to the internet. Moreover, a shift from cinema as most popular medium to social media has taken place in just a few decades. An essential difference between these media, amongst others, is that social media handles a user-generated content structure, as opposed to cinema's general top-down structure. This means that on social media users can share their own created content. As Instagram handles a user-generated content structure, the content that is visible on there seems more 'live' and therefore also more realistic or unmediated. Moreover, a big part of television's and cinema's role models have turned into caricature-like personas: in the context of the show or film they represent something (a lawyer; an action hero; a politician) but they really are empty representatives, coming from no actual original but based on a stereotype idea (of the lawyer; the action hero; the politician). These days, it is known and obvious that these cinema and television role-models are staged ideal images.⁵² Content on Instagram, however, is still believed to be a most accurate representation of reality, as it includes multiple content creators (consisting of ordinary people) and therefore multiple gazes that give their representation of reality. These gazes, however, are influenced by others' gazes. And this collection of gazes we can call a shared social reality: a

⁵² M. de Lange, *Moving Circles. Mobile media and playful identities*, Rotterdam 2010, p. 224.

reflection of the behavior setting that is not necessarily realistic, as it is formed by people's behavior that is influenced by the expectations of others and from which certain unrealistic norms and goals arise.⁵³ As the content that was or is depicted in cinema was or is more obviously staged (cinema is known to be a copy or representation of reality), the content in social media seems realistic because their makers are people like you and me. History seems to repeat itself: as people once thought they witnessed realistic depictions of women in cinema as opposed to the more obvious unrealistic paintings in old and avant-garde art, people now feel like they finally see the 'real stuff', only because these content makers are regular people.

But, as mentioned before, social media content often contains a constructed reality. They concern day-to-day-looking photos that often contain technical manipulation by use of apps or a more analogue mediation: selfies made only in certain attractive angles, photos of parties and other social events, or photos of locations and happenings that its maker set up solely to show their followers. These photos often only show people's 'good' moments: moments that can contribute in coming closer to the prevailing ideal image of the behavior setting (the behavior setting being a person's online environment). The phenomenon of people preferring to share their good moments as opposed to giving a realistic depiction of life including all less happy moments could be termed the 'artificial crocodile effect'.⁵⁴ This effect implies that the artificial or unrealistic is found to be more attractive and realistic than the real, considering we mainly see artificial things in our surroundings and behavior setting which constructs our reality. At this point of hyperreality, as Baudrillard discussed it, where all signs are simulations based on mis-representations, all one knows are the simulated mis-representations, and therefore these become our frame of reference, one's unrealistic reality.

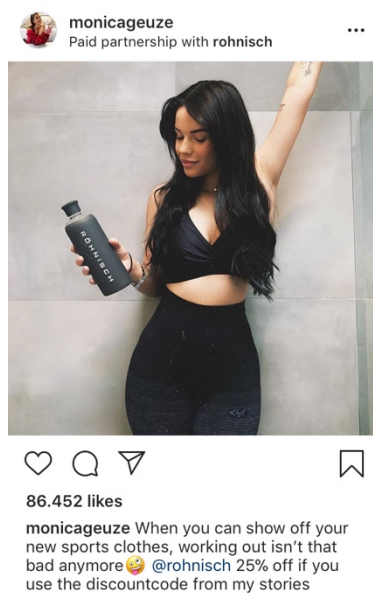
So how come these unrealistic norms and goals also prevail in a user-generated structured medium? A medium that belongs to the people and therefore should contain realistic norms and goals, without a specific gaze that has its say in how women, or life in general, should be? The presence of unrealistic norms and goals in social media is partly due to the fact that in the past few years, social media have commercialized immensely.⁵⁵ Companies use influencers to convince (niche) groups

⁵³ K. van Es, 'Liveness Redux: On Media and Their Claim to be Live', *Media, Culture and Society* 39 (2017) 8, pp. 1248-1249.

⁵⁴ S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen. Identity in the age of the Internet*, London 1997, pp. 178-180.

⁵⁵ Van Es 2017 (see footnote 52), pp. 1248-1249.

of people to buy their product through sponsored posts (fig. 37, 38 and 39).⁵⁶ Again, companies make use of the two-step flow theory, placing their product in the context of the ideal image by means of binding it to a person who people look up to and who comes closest to the ideal image of the behavior setting. Due to cinema and television's obvious mediation and its these days character-like role models, the mirror function has shifted towards people's smartphone screen, where they see influencers living the perfect life. The follower wants to be like the influencer and gets convinced they (falsely) need the product to form their identity in a way so that they become more like the influencer. Identity, once again, expresses itself in a very visual way, and as Instagram is a very visual-based platform, it is the perfect platform for a user's impression management and a companies' (identity) advertising.



From left to right: fig. 37, 38, 39. Screenshots of Instagram accounts 'samanthamariaofficial', 'monicageuze' and 'iskra', all from 2019.

⁵⁶ An influencer is a social media user with a relatively large number of followers.

In a Western society where in the last decades a hefty increase of people's online presence has taken place, one's online identity might just be found as important as one's offline identity. Moreover, for some it has come to the point where the creation or performance of one's online identity heavily influences one's offline behavior, and maybe therefore even their offline identity, we could say. As some are spending more time interacting socially online than offline, their online identity and impression management are prioritized. They go places they otherwise maybe would not have gone, they dress a way they otherwise maybe would not have dressed, and they do things they otherwise maybe would not have done: all for the perfect Instagram photo.⁵⁷ This way, the line between life online and offline starts to fade away. Especially younger generations that were born during or after the coming of the internet, called the 'digital natives', experience their identity as fluid or something variable: it can exist in multiple dimensions which, we could say, makes them live in a mixed-reality.⁵⁸ Life (or at least a big part of it) becomes a constant and ongoing identity performance, always trying to meet a certain ideal image, but never achieving the end goal, as the ideal image is a hyperreal one. Just as Sherman presumably implied by means of dressing up as different characters in public, showing how life to women is like a constant, unsatisfactory performance.

Another similarity between Sherman's Instagram account and her earlier photographic work is the working method she used for these projects. As for her earlier works, Sherman used Instagram's structures in order to deconstruct them. She, being an influencer, shows her followers just how Instagram works, mainly in a social perspective. By making her followers critically aware of the technical manipulation behind the photos they see, she literally shows how distorted Instagram's ideal reality actually is. However, As Sherman didn't put out an artist statement for her Instagram selfies and didn't speak about it at all in public for about a year she still claims she is "just playing with her phone".⁵⁹ It is clear that Sherman is a silent deconstructivist: she likes to explain her work by means of her work and the demonstration it at the same time forms, instead of talking about it in words. For her earlier works, Sherman mainly did this through not giving her works a title, calling them all numbered *Untitled's*, and

⁵⁷ Concluded from personal observation and my own research paper for the course Playful Media Cultures 2017 (see footnote 45).

⁵⁸ Kholeif 2015 (see footnote 7), pp. 31-32.

⁵⁹ Russeth 2017 (see footnote 3).

in that way, not giving a direct explanation with the work. A surprising difference between all of Sherman's previous series and her work on Instagram is that her selfies all contain captions, or titles, as opposed to all of the *Untitled's* throughout her oeuvre. Perhaps this is a way for Sherman to use the structure in order to deconstruct, as it is commonplace for an Instagram user to add a caption to each photo when they post and share it. The captions Sherman uses for her photos often contain short, funny and lighthearted lines, that only sometimes seem to relate to the photo depicted. This way of captioning selfies seems very related to Instagram's 'caption culture', as I will call it, where users mostly add a caption quite irrelevant to the photo itself.

The phenomenon of Instagram users' focus on visuals or surface and therefore also often lighthearted use of text presumably originates from the fact that nowadays, because of the commercialization of social media, identity is expressed mainly visually, especially on a platform like Instagram that is highly based on visuals. It is clear users mainly want to show their followers an aesthetically pleasing photo which is part of their impression management, expresses their (wanted) identity, and is crucial considering their path towards becoming their favorite hyperreal ideal image. Putting Sherman's Instagram selfies in the visual context of her oeuvre, we could say their characters look like a mixture of the *Rear Screen Projections*, *Society Portraits* and *Clowns* characters. The use of technical manipulation in Sherman's Instagram selfies seems like a logical step as she started experimenting with technical manipulation since the early 1990's: from exploring her camera's technical features to

editing in Photoshop from 2003 onwards. Sherman's use of overly technical manipulation in her selfie series forms a crucial aspect as it demonstrates something that is intrinsic to many people's use of the medium that these works are on, deconstructing the beforementioned and the eventual possible consequences it has. This overly technical manipulation concerns an over the top edit which gives Sherman's selfie characters an almost clownish look (fig. 40). This makes her selfies to a certain extent visually comparable to her *Clowns* series. However, as Sherman in her *Clowns* series maintained a method of



Fig. 40: Cindy Sherman, *Feeling perky*, 2017.

depicting intense emotion behind an artificial surface in order to show the person behind it, we could say Sherman inversed this working method in her selfie series: depicting intense, extreme artificiality on the surface without any seemingly deep meaning. Because of commercialization and the unrealistic norms and goals of many of our behavior setting's, artificiality is often what we recognize, it formed our frame of reference, our reality. Assuming Sherman is taking on digital culture's language in order to deconstruct in the literal sense by means of lighthearted captions, it could well be an explanation for her selfies' intensity in artificiality when we say it is yet another way of Sherman taking on digital culture's language, only this time visually. Her extreme use of this language makes for over-identification: emphasizing the presence of the language and thereby creating awareness of its existence. Sherman screams to the people of the digital generation in their own language: that of extreme superficiality, possibly (and paradoxically) getting them thinking, perhaps even affecting their emotions, deeply touching the other Instagram user behind their screen. At the same time these selfies might speak to other generations: those that were born before digitalization, those that now perhaps struggle keeping up with beauty standards. In this sense, Sherman's selfies also compare to her *Society Portraits*, where we see the same kind of women with wrinkled necks and pigmentation spots, taking desperate artificial measures in order to rise up to the norms and goals of their behavior setting.

Considering the other posts on Sherman's Instagram account that aren't selfies, we could say they are all part of Sherman's adoption of digital culture's language, adapting to its behavior setting and thus all part of her online impression management as the visual expression of identity goes beyond only self-portraiture: one's impression management contains all that has to do with how one acts and looks, to where one goes and what one does in daily life. In this sense we could also say that these photos also contribute in demonstrating Sherman's artistic and social standpoint and eventually help deconstructing Instagram's layered structures, whether she meant, likes and admits it, or not.

Conclusion

After this theoretical research analyzing Sherman's Instagram selfies, I think it is safe to say that it is possible to characterize her selfie series as a deconstructive

post-internet art work. The selfie series theoretically and aesthetically very well fits in her body of work, considering its possible theoretical background that concerns theories of representational mechanisms in popular media, gender theories concerning Lacan and Mulvey's mirror stage, Ricoeur, Goffman and Butler's narrative identity by means of behavior setting and impression management, and one's sense of reality, concerning Baudrillard's description of the phenomenon of hyperreality. Besides, also put in historical context, it makes sense that a post-modern deconstructive artist like Sherman picks up on the popularity of social media and gets familiar with its structures in order to then publicly deconstruct them. This public deconstruction is able to create awareness when it comes to the existence of people's behavior settings and the role commercial companies have in the formation of one's sense of reality. Sherman's deconstruction and this analysis of her deconstruction, however, leaves another part of the story unwritten: what does this fluid sense of identity do to one's mental or maybe even physical state? How do young contemporary artists who are part of the digital generation pick up this topic, and do they see and experience it differently, considering they themselves might be experiencing their identity as fluid, living in a mixed-reality? Finding answers to these questions would require researching the work of young contemporary post-internet artists like Amalia Ulman or Roxanne Gatt, for example. Maybe analyzing their work will tell us something about a digital native's view on the role that social media have in topics like representation, identity and reality. Maybe, through their stories of experience, it could also tell us something about the consequences of being surrounded by social media to a very great extent: something we in Western civilization all are these days. Because of the far-reaching presence of social media, whether we see our friends and family actively on their smartphones in person, or the behavioral differences that came up as a result of social media: we are all affected by it, even those who don't use any social media platforms. Therefore, awareness of social media's platforms' layered structures and their possible social consequences is important. Through her selfies Sherman seems to attempt to create awareness concerning what is happening to us and the people around us, making her Instagram selfie series a project of social importance and a worthy series of art works to be added to her oeuvre.

However, even though Sherman admits that her selfies aren't selfies and that they depict different characters to which we thus can acclaim all of the beforementioned theoretical background, she also claims that she is merely amusing

herself creating these selfies, insinuating that they might just be coming from Cindy Sherman the individual, not Cindy Sherman the artist whom we all know of and of whom we all have certain expectations. Sherman's comments concerning her selfies seem contradictory, and it raises the question: where lies the line between an artist's personal and artistic expressions? And to what extent does the artist remain authorized to independently decide where that line lies? In a situation where an artist adopts a new medium that has thus far only been used by the public, how do we know if an artist's actions on there come from them as a person part of the public or them as the artist? Are the person and the artist indeed two separate entities or can we say everything in an artist's life is art, or at least part of the artistic process? Considering the latter, where everything the artist does is interpreted part of their artistic oeuvre; where all their actions and results are placed in context of their previous actions and results; where thus these actions and results gain their worth by being put in context created by the past, it seems like art's worth only exists because of its context. Might art therefore be intrinsically worthless? Otherwise, Sherman's selfies would just be your usual selfies, those that you forget after scrolling down just three times. However, also considering this analysis on her selfies, it seems that Sherman, besides the expectations people have of her being a woman, is also expected to perform a certain way as an artist. No matter what she does, it will always be interpreted by means of the context that is made of her past actions and results. Maybe this is why at a certain point Sherman removed herself from her art works. To separate the face from the work, the personal expectations from the artistic. Perhaps Sherman having fun on her smartphone and digitally transforming her face to her is a way out of day-to-day reality, where she constantly gets confronted with the expectations people have of her as an established artist. Perhaps Sherman feels imprisoned in of her own body of work, lightheartedly Instagramming her way into distraction of this oppression. In that case, I am sorry, miss Sherman, for writing this, and keeping you in your metaphysical prison cell.

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