Amalia Ulman Interviewed by Catherine Wood

Within a classic narrative of performance art history, photographic or video 'documentation' is a poor substitute for the apparent authenticity of the act. In this scheme of things, a live action encountered in real-time is primary, superior to the after-image that might stand in for its passing, within a book or exhibition. For works of 'body art' that sought to foreground the palpable vulnerability of the artist's own presence in real-time and in relation to the witness of a live audience – for example, early works by Marina Abramović or Chris Burden – access to the sensations and high stakes of the original act is inevitably hampered via its mediation as a photographic image, even if that image (of Abramović scratched and decked with roses and chains, smeared with lipstick in *Rhythm O* [1973]), or Burden clutching his arm in pain after being shot, in *Shoot* (1971) becomes a well known and iconic representation.

In the context of the USA and Europe during the 1970s, a number of artists began to make work in which they imagined performance taking place within a new reality: inside the space of the image itself. This may have been in part an anticipation of the increasing power of the documentary photograph to gain visibility, over and above the moment of the live act, but, moreover, it was an attempt for many artists to find ways to deal, artistically, with the acceleration of media images with which one was confronted on a daily basis, its protagonists (models, actors) offering new patterns for behaviours, appearances and identities. Swapping authentic presence in 'real life' for iconicity, this kind of performance was not only primarily aimed at the camera's eye instead of live audiences, but also imagined the world within the photograph's frame as a space to inhabit: an alternative order of fictional space in two dimensions. Artists including Cindy Sherman in the USA, Urs Luthi in Germany or Natalia LL in Poland were, from different perspectives, transforming themselves into images that

assimilated to or approximated other image-types already circulating in the world of mass media or art history: from Hollywood, fashion magazines or pornographic magazines. They conjured characters who inhabited the image plane and submitted to it on its own terms. Their appearances were not fleshed out in the dimensions of real space and time, but compressed into flat still and moving images: pictures with limited depth but infinite potential to be manipulated, performed, and styled; a kind of two-dimensional theatre space.

But if Cindy Sherman and the Transformer generation inhabited the image as a space in which to act out, they did not, perhaps, push their image-avatars out into the real world. They performed for the camera, but their images did not necessarily act by being visible within distribution modes typical of the image habitat from which they were borne, being destined for display in the gallery[1]. Since the later 1970s, artists such as Suzanne Lacy or Cosey Fanni Tutti have – in quite different ways – anticipated the workings of contemporary social media. These artists have initiated and directed the performance of not only images– whether from a basis of staging choreographed actions, or engaging in forms of self-performance – but also intervened in image distribution circuits. They have each instigated alternative orders of 'liveness' within the given institutions of mass media (television, newspapers, magazines), intervening in those formats from a feminist perspective.

In the 1980s, live tableaux designed by Lacy on activist themes for works such as *In Mourning and In Rage*, or *The Crystal Quilt*, were deliberately designed and stage-produced to work for photographic and film capture. This material was either simultaneously or subsequently made visible through media broadcast and distribution on television, newspapers or magazines, thus impacting a far wider audience than those who witnessed the

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[1] Although, Cindy Sherman's first series – the *Bus Rider Series*: a series of portraits of people travelling on the bus performed by Sherman in makeup and costume – was originally shown, pasted onto the inside of the bus.

action in its immediate present. More importantly, Lacy's images were put out to 'perform' amongst and against a plethora of mainstream media images being consumed by that mass audience.

Cosey Fanni Tutti's appearances in pornographic magazines were conceived by her as a subtly transgressive form of self-performance in which the materials and tools of her production were co-opted by her participation in the industry. She would work as a model, perform and be photographed, and then would capture her own work by purchasing and archiving the magazines, and exhibiting her own pages in galleries. Meanwhile, her work was distributed as a stealth intervention, invisibly, through the ordinary circulation of the magazines. The fact that she was paid for the work was essential to her own economic survival as an artist.

If Lacy's approach to images was founded upon an attempt to intervene in an increasingly powerful image media landscape by inserting strong, alternative, activist images that redressed the under-representation of women, and women's issues (so-called), Fanni Tutti took an approach of over-identification with given imagery, becoming identical with existing depictions of women and of women's sexuality as a way of experiencing from the inside what it felt like to be 'those women' who are sold to us as fantasy: a form of apparent submission to the given modes of sexual pleasure on display, whilst profiting both economically and as an artist from the work (that effectively printed and thus produced her own artworks).

Amalia Ulman, working within an increasingly complicated 21st century context of social media, extends such strategies around inhabiting media institutions and 'formats' initiated by her feminist forebears in various ways. These apparently divergent attitudes to the relationship between 'reality' and the photographic document – the former being either an indexical trace of something that really happened, the latter as a space in which reality might

be conjured temporarily, imagined and played out - apparently conflict. But a number of artists of the contemporary generation inhabit a landscape that takes this photographic suspension of disbelief for granted. With the dissolving of photographic truth initiated by the tools of photoshop, and the image-sharing, prosumer culture of social media (and its attendant myriad possibilities for image manipulation there too), the photograph serves as a double-edged form of evidence and fakery, not unlike the genre of documentary-soap (or docufiction) common in semi-scripted television series such as 'Made in Chelsea' that present what they term a 'structured-reality', performed for the camera. For many artists now, there is an inherent understanding of the extent to which the camera's ubiquitous presence elicits performance rather than simply records, and the cross-platform nature of social communications and networks means that there is little distinction between mediated and real-time presence so far as 'authentic' subjectivity or, indeed, social interaction goes. Questions of intimacy, identity, reciprocity and responsibility tested in real time by the likes of Abramović can be explored – albeit in transposed fashion - through performance that inhabits image media, perhaps with a greater degree of authentic contemporary relevance than would a strategy involving the artist and audience sitting together in a room.

In her most well-known work, *Excellences and Perfections*, a five-months-long Instagram narrative begun on 19 April 2014, Ulman shared pictures (as an apparently authentic user) of her makeovers and lifestyle choices, including the taking of extreme measures such as having plastic surgery, only later revealing the persona and story as a fabrication, with critics calling it a 'hoax'. Throughout her body of work using social media, Ulman creates picture narratives featuring herself styled as characters who build slowly through time, and whose appearance and interests more or less assimilate to commonly shared themes found on the medium. Using her real name, Ulman nevertheless constructs the storylines in which she appears, and which are released gradually through months or years on

Instagram, gaining followers by utilising 'success' strategies based on attractiveness and careful topic selection. Her interest in performing by inhabiting the fictional personae and worlds she creates is twofold: she tests her own life experience against this fantasy hybrid avatar that is part real and part invention, and she also investigates how her stories might utilise triggers to popularity common to the platform to insinuate themselves into people's imaginations. Her followers are not sitting down to watch a film or read a story, but her images might play at the back of their minds and generate narrative interpolation. Questions concerning the nature of contemporary reality abound. What does her brand of Instagram 'realness' (to borrow a drag-ball term for passing from the 1980s) mean in relation to the lived reality she and her followers inhabit? Where does the performance lie, and what is the performed action? What does the artist's use of her own body and name signify in an otherwise place-less topography of online communication? Can 'action' and 'documentation' be separated in Ulman's evolving work, or does her work register a new reality in which life, performance and media are impossible to unpick?

Regarding your work, the question of 'documentation' doesn't necessarily seem like the right term, but perhaps that's a good starting point: where is the performance? Can we say that you document your performances? It's not as though they precede the image, because the image is what 'performs' on Instagram?

I think these things are kind of simultaneous. Because of the Internet, the performance archives itself and the moment of performance is when the image is uploaded first and people react to it first. So, it's occurring 'live' when they are following the narrative on a day to day basis: that's the performative aspect. But, then instantaneously it gets archived so it is

different from other kinds of photography of performances. As soon as a photograph is uploaded online, the performance and its archive are already the same thing.

That's an interesting paradox, there is no 'real-time' liveness, it's to do with when the image is viewed or received by a viewer on their own device? I had thought about your work in classic terms, within a history of artists ranging from Claude Cahun to Cindy Sherman who were – as our Tate show put it - 'performing for the camera'. Those images portray a sense of intimacy in their capture by the artist-subjects in their studios. But the later exposure (in books or exhibitions) is at a significant remove. They are clearly documents of an intimate process. But, it is interesting that between that capture of your own image, and the performative moment of showing, by sharing on Instagram, there is a double layer to the intimacy that we somehow witness.

I feel that the performance happens when the audience look at the image and they react in the way they are supposed to react as part of a narrative. And as soon they don't feel that anymore it just becomes a document: after that first interaction it's an archive. Because that is when the performance really happens. When they realise it's a 'work', and it's older, that is the archive of the performance. But, materially it is the same image, it just functions on different levels.

Traditionally, the debate in performance discourse in relation to photography began with whether you could capture the authentic live moment, it was about an indexical link to a lived occurrence: whether it could give some kind of palpable access to the real work. So, the live action is always primary, in that body-art-related discussion. But, for you that is asking the wrong question?

Yeah, I guess so, because it is simultaneously archive and performance. The performative aspect comes from the interaction with the audience and the audience can interact with it any time. You know, it depends on their lives. And then background knowledge: people that already know it's an art piece, I feel, have a different reaction. And then people that don't know and have that genuine experience of the piece, that can happen anytime basically. Because even though *Excellences and Perfections* has had a lot of press, there are people that will find it and go through it and still maybe feel something outside of it being an archived piece of work.

There are so many layers of intimacy, realness and authenticity at play. On one level, there's a certain sense of intimacy deriving from that moment, for you, when you are recording yourself. Yet you have already touched on the crux of the issue, which is that your action, actually the performative action, is the uploading and the conversation that happens publicly, subsequently. But, then as you said, people can come to it afterwards, even knowing it's an artwork and have another kind of experience of it, and within the frame of seeing it as an artwork it offers a kind of meta-documentation of itself?

Yes, because you know what it is. But, then, I feel there are other people that just come upon it and just have a similar reaction to the original reaction of people when they didn't know.

So, if you come with a knowing frame - knowing it is an artwork - you are seeing it as documentation. But, if you accidentally come across it, even a year later, 'innocently', then it's still performing 'live', it's still active?

Yeah, I think so. At least in the case of *Excellences and Perfections*. I don't like using the word 'hoax', but it was more about that: it rested upon not really knowing that it was planned.

I'm working on a new performance, *Privilege*, and I am allowing myself to be way more creative developing a character almost from scratch. So in this case it is not something I am emulating and needs to be followed through by other people to be complete. It's a different thing in the new work because the aesthetic is unique, the documentation and the live experience can be closer to each other. You can enjoy it the same even knowing it's an art piece, because you don't need...

That suspension of disbelief?

Yeah, you don't need to be tricked into thinking it's not an art piece to enjoy it. In this case my decisions are more aesthetic. So you can look it the way you look at a painting.

So it is different from Excellences and Perfections *where you were embedded in Instagram in a, sort of, 'invisible' way, in the sense that you were assimilating to norms and modes of self-presentation that you found there?*

Yes. The problem with that for me is that as much as I enjoyed doing it, I didn't have much creative freedom because I was emulating other things and had to be realistic. And for example, you know, I couldn't really go crazy or decide 'oh, I have seen that girl make the avocado toast this way, but, you know, I am an artist and I am going to make the avocado look orange and the toast blue'. It wouldn't have worked.

In Excellences and Perfections *you assumed – perhaps – a more 'passive' attitude towards the given successful images on Instagram. You became that girl with the avocado toast and champagne spa weekend. Would you say your new work,* Privilege *(2016), is more 'active'?*

Yes, because instead of having to emulate other aesthetics for the sake of credibility, for *Privilege* I was able to create my own. Which was much more fun and interesting but couldn't have happened without making *Excellences and Perfections* first. First I had to gather an audience.

Excellences and Perfections *was more like a camouflage in a way? You had to create a form of verisimilitude or 'assimilatude'?*

Yeah, that didn't work for me ultimately. I am interested in aesthetic composition. I like playing with everything: with drawing, texture, etcetera, and in the case of *Excellences and Perfections* I could construct good photos, but then I'd have to be copying all the other details – the colour, the furniture, the music. I had to be very specific. Whereas, now I have created a character from zero and that allows me to really indulge with materials, colours, sound, things that I want to work with and that I have to develop myself. And I think that is why it took me a little longer than I expected to start this new performance, because to build the ground for it, for people to understand through repetition what was going on visually, to get used to how the performance is going to look, without really knowing it, was more laborious.

What do you mean by building a ground? How do you do that?

After doing the last performance, I stopped posting my own images and was using cartoons by another artist, with whom I was collaborating, because I knew I was going to work on the new performance and I didn't want it to go back to back. That would be very obvious to many people; so to create a more obvious pause, I had posted those cartoons. Then, after a while, when I started sharing the new material I really needed to raise my viewing figures and be 'popular', and I know the tricks, I know what you need to do. So I began to employ those to get viewers again.

How did you work those out, the 'tricks'? (As an aside: 'doing tricks' is a phrase used in relation to prostitution).

Exactly the same tricks mainstream media uses, very old school techniques. It's creating an image of success and looking pretty. Really, it's so basic it's embarrassing. So, I would do things like posting magazines I was featured in. People would think that I was back to just being myself and self-promoting. But everything was a deliberate strategy for engaging people again. People would think I wasn't performing any more, and then very slowly I would start repeating more and more often certain things, like – for example – a colour scheme, or a certain topic to then tie the images of the new performance together into a story, in a very concise way.

But because it was something that I made from scratch, although I expected it to take only one month, it took me, four or five months to really get people to catch onto its elements: the setting of 'the office', the character 'Bob' (a pigeon). It was through repetition, during a few months, that people could begin to feel that these things existed, and that they knew who Bob is and that I like red, or whatever. People are now shifting their assumptions on what my normal behavior is. So, now that there is trust, I am allowed to do whatever I like

again.

So you build a trust with your brand almost?

Yeah, exactly. So, now, I started being 'pregnant' for example and now, you know, people buy into it, like 'yeah, sure'. They believe it.

So, is this on Instagram, live, now?

Yes, it's the work I'm doing now. And it has already involved a lot of staged content. For example, Bob [the pigeon]: I bought him in a slaughterhouse, but then the scene I portrayed him in, it's as if he had sneaked into my office. I took low quality iPhone videos of him flying inside the cubicle while I screamed 'Oh my God, No!'. And people really think - it's not that crazy of course - that maybe he came in through the window. I don't show the part where I drove the car around Vernon and bought him, put him in a cage, went to the office, let him free and then pretended. So, that sort of trickery is already part of a narrative where people are following the story.

So, the 'narrative' is all about your selection process of the photos you've constructed, what you choose to let out? Do you write a script in advance? Or how do you do it?

I don't really write it. Not in detail at least. I'm aware of the bigger picture, the key moments: beginning, climax and end.

Through what kind of time period do you plan?

Well, with this one I had it easier. Because it's a pregnancy, it has a clear beginning and a span of nine months, and it clearly has three episodes again. Usually, with the scripts, I know what kind of images I want to use and I more or less line things up. But, it depends so much on feedback, and how people react to certain things. And then I can make decisions as I go to exploit some things or others. With the pregnancy story, I felt that it's such a complicated, taboo, conflicted topic in America, that it would be crazy to do it… but I wanted to.

To 'announce' my 'pregnancy', I didn't even write much, I just wrote 'Boom, ha ha', and showed a positive pregnancy test. That's it. And then when I read the comments section I saw that there had even been a little fight between people commenting things like 'oh congratulations!' and a girl who said, 'yeah, I have a bunch of those in a drawer and both of them are dead', as in, I was pregnant twice and I had two abortions. Reading that and then answers like 'do you think that is an appropriate thing to say?' I was thinking, wow, it's interesting how you can drop a little thing… It's nice when you can be subtle and still raise hell.

So by posting an image, you can just imply the beginning of a story, or spark one, you mean?

That 'Boom' image (the one with the positive pregnancy test), yes. You put it there and then people will reflect their own things. And the less you say, I think, the more people build things up.

You just guide them a little bit, and they project all their own ideas, feelings, experience onto it. Which is what happened last time as well, because I didn't share much information either and people were really curious.

So this is related, it seems, to the way in which you have described how Instagram might work 'in the back of someone's consciousness'? Rather than a person opening a book or watching a film, in a concentrated way, via Instagram they get fed a little drip every now and then and as you have said, the narrative you conjure is glimpsed, and becomes embedded in, their daily life somehow? What is this space you are trying to open up in their lives?

I feel as though it has to do also with the fact that these topics are very contemporary and are there for so many people. The first one was a lot about body issues and everyone, well - many girls especially - had considered, at some point, getting surgery – a boob job, for example. Even just thinking about it because you read about it in a magazine – for that split second you consider it. My work reflects on that. And now pregnancy, because, most of my friends are not baby crazy or anything, but… they have explored that thought: 'I could have a kid… but, oh, I don't have any money'. I am tapping into and exploiting my own insecurities, and the same insecurities are shared by a lot of people. And I think that it is when it really works because it is such a common thing. For example, I never had an abortion, but I always imagined what it'd be like to have kids and thought about it and made plans with ex-boyfriends. There is a lot of common ground. Either because you hate it, you know, or you really want one and you love babies, these kinds of issues are universal.

So you take as 'triggers' those things that everybody has got an opinion on, somehow? You have talked about how your narratives insert this fiction into other people's experience, and also open up a space where other people input their view. But what about your own relationship with making these images of yourself? Looking at yourself?

Well, there is a lot of performance, actually, that comes into play in making my work. Because by contrast, for example, I was in a photo studio yesterday for a fashion magazine shoot. And that is absolutely not how I work. There, I was a mannequin basically, because I couldn't see myself. And they said, 'oh, lift your arm a little bit more', etcetera. And the photos don't look natural, just very static. I posed for one minute and then put on a different outfit. I couldn't get into any mood or role or whatever. I wasn't really acting. I was just cold, still. When I make my own images, I go intro character for at least 24 hours, it is only then, when I can make the images.

This is because they were styling you and usually you are your own material?

I mean it was my style, in terms of clothes, but I was being run by a team of people and having to pose. It was also a film camera, which changes the process a little bit; it's like, five photos, instead of thirty photos where you can, you know, go crazy.

How many photos do you take when you're creating a shoot for your own work?

What I do when I work on a performance is to take a lot of pictures on the same day. I relax, unwind play around and then go into the zone (as I call it). It takes me a few minutes to take the pictures, It's getting into the character that takes me longer. Some people have told me that without knowing it I was doing method acting.

So your relationship towards what you release through time is faked in relation to the actual moment in which it is happening. This is completely against the grain of what Instagram is

meant to be. So, you might take enough photos in one session to last your 'release' of images a month?

Yes, I'd get ten photos in one day. It takes hours, and some of those hours I'm just lying on the floor and then I take, say, five photos. So, it has a lot do with acting because it's not staged in the traditional sense. I spend two days going crazy and getting all the material.

So, I feel that performing, for me, is very important. If I were to stage a picture I'd feel that the photo has no aura. But if I'm actually in character, I feel as though it has a little bit of truth in it. I am not just thinking about doing the laundry and doing the photo on the side. I really go into the character's brain.

So, what is your working practice like then? You might spend two days intensely making photos, where you have to be in the zone, but then other times with your work, what are you working on?

I research or edit the photos. This is a different process. I can do that anytime. I could be sitting at a computer and editing, or reading and writing other days. I have found most useful to act two days out of the week. When I do it is fairly intuitive: I might say, 'today feels like the day of the crazy mood'. I feel that is also why I always like working in hotels, because it's more separate from my life, and I can meet different people. Perform my roles with strangers.

So, you would rent a room to stage your photos?

My office is the office that appears in the work, yes, which I am starting to resent because it is really too personal, like a home. At the beginning it felt sort of anonymous and didn't have any personal feeling, which I liked: it makes me work really hard. I really hate it when people would say about the last performance, 'oh, she sneaked into hotels and took photos...'. No, I rented rooms and stayed in those hotels for one or two days and really performed during those two days.

People wanted to read it as though it was a guerrilla action of some sort? But it's important to you that you did it 'legitimately', or in a normal, everyday way? How would you describe it?

It has to do less with the idea of legitimacy but with the craft that took place. Yes: I stayed there, watched TV, played, danced, really experiencing the room, preparing my role as an actress, while also looking at the light during different moments of the day, as a photographer. There are, a lot of things that are not captured on camera. And that's my process. I didn't sneak in, I really stayed there, paid for it. I would spend time dancing and being silly and then take a photo and then nap and then take another photo, you know. I organise everything around spending time at the locations, and then the magic would happen. But, it is not really staged, I don't plan the photographs, I create the situations.

But, I think that is how many artists work. For example, Rauschenberg, whose show I am working on now, would work like that: set everything up in a very organised way, and then have the time to play freely with it.

Yes, I like things to have a sense of spontaneity. Even if it is planned you also leave some things for chance, which I think is very important, because otherwise it looks like a fashion shoot that has to be made in four hours because people have to go to lunch.

But, you are doing it all yourself?

Yes, everything I do by myself.

Are there people that work with you? Who takes the photos?

Now, thankfully, yes. My husband is a good photographer, and he is really fun. I always hated working with partners, but he is really good. My mother also helps me sometimes. But I still do 90% of my work alone.

So, he does the photographs for you?

Only some of them. But during the last performance, *Excellences & Perfections*, everything was by me, and I still do a lot of it by myself. I use a tripod and it is pretty low key. I never really use lights or anything, because I like natural light a lot. Now, working on *Privilege*, is the first time that I felt that collaborating is fun and it works out well, I feel comfortable enough to perform. And it is great because there are things that I want to copy from popular themes or Vines that are done by more than one person, you know. And I really need an extra hand! Otherwise I wouldn't be able to do it. There are things I can't be doing with the tripod only.

How do you think about the idea of real correction to your physical self, actual changes to your appearance in real time, in relation to the capacity to manipulate photos digitally? How much do you work with that, in post-production? And what does it mean, this relationship between the photo (selfie) and real appearance? Especially given that so much social interaction happens online, via screens?

Well, Photoshop is not that great, in my opinion. When I did the last performance, I really tried to be as fit as possible, you know, because there is a limit to what I could do with Photoshop. You know, it can help a little bit, but you cannot retouch everything. Also having to be half naked in some photos I'd rather feel good with myself as well. You know, I edited colour and re-shaping, but I did more makeup and prosthetics, (a lot of socks in my bra) than Photoshop. Because it is easier to manipulate a photo when things are almost already there.

How much, when you're making your own photographs, are you really conscious of performing to the image plane, to the lens and how much are you thinking about it as more of a social relationship to your audience? Or are those two things inseparable? Are you conscious of truth in Barthes's idea that you are transforming yourself into an image in advance and you are thinking how will you look on a flat screen or are you thinking more emotionally about how your look would connect with your audience somehow?

I think it goes together, but with certain shots the way people would digest the image or how they perceive the character's behaviour, has more weight than the visual composition. So in cases like that, I think about the storyline more than the photograph in itself, as photography. But when I get to do both it's a win/win.

As a composition?

Yeah. Because I am working with a scripted narrative I really see things in the longer term. Sometimes, to go with my story, I know that I have to post a shitty photo that is not going to get any likes. But, within the larger scheme of things, that's going to make a lot of sense. At first, many people don't see it making sense, but then from a distance and through time it gains meaning.

So, you are, in a sense, networking images?

Yeah, so, I really think more about reaction or reception and the performative aspect than the photograph. Then aesthetics become a secondary thing, if it looks good, great. But if not, it's also okay.

So, it is a tool?

Yeah.

Because, you've talked about photo-archiving things rather than acquiring them physically. Excellences and Perfections *looks very much to do with consumerism. But you have said that in a broader sense, you aren't that into owning things, but more into documenting them? A photo is a tool in a story, but also a way to possess?*

That had to do with the video essay *Buyer, Walker, Rover*, where I analyse all these objects from Poundlands, Eurostores, Dollar Shops etc.

Then, I didn't need, nor did I want, to buy those objects and collect them. Instead, I was interested in documenting them with photographs because they mattered to me visually; so their materiality was insignificant. I didn't need to own them because knowing that they existed was enough for me. I feel like that with many things, that's why I am not really offended by appropriation, even if it is of my own work.

If other people use your image, reproduce it, how do you feel about that?

For example, one of the photos that I took with my husband recently went really popular so he said, 'I bet you this is already on Tumblr with thousands and thousands of notes'. Which is great, but then it wouldn't be attached to mine or his name; by then the photograph wouldn't be part of anything but would be instead a free image – and I'm okay with that.

That's odd in a way isn't it because if you are a painter it would be different? Because it's a photograph it assimilates to its context of other photographs….

Yeah, but that is how it works. For example, if something becomes very popular, people will save it to their desktop, put it on Tumblr and, like that, no one will ever associate that photograph with a specific author unless they do a reverse search on Google and start connecting the dots. Most images have a free life afterwards. But that is part of the Internet; so I guess that if you are making art nowadays you have to be conscious of this and take it for granted. And I feel the same way with my writing, especially because English is not my first language, and sometimes I see things written down, maybe just like three words together, that sound really good and I just put it in a text of mine. And I don't really attribute it, and I feel

many people work like that today. If anything I'd mention the source's name afterwards, but it'd never be like a traditional quoting.

No, there is this collective brain thing, which bypasses that a little bit. Maybe a complication of the idea that all writing is quotation: and now phrases come as 'readymades'. The building blocks of our word and image worlds are no longer, maybe, pure elements but existing combinations, pre-made, that we again put together in new ways. But if your image is circulating freely online and anyone can effectively 'use' it, does it affect your own sense of freedom or identity as a person in real life?

Well, I definitely wouldn't perceive the use of these images, from either *Privilege* or *Excellences and Perfections* as an invasion of my privacy because they are fiction and don't reflect my private life. I don't feel the violation so much. Just like I don't feel flattered when someone comments on my huge tits in a photo where I know I stuffed my bra with socks.

So where does your own reality come into the work? If the 1970s model of body art promised intimacy and access to the vulnerability of the artist's live presence (theatricalized though this may have been), how does the image we see of you relate to your lived reality? What does it mean to be human in the age of Instagram?!

Well, the main difference between now and the 20th century, is that everyone is confronted with problems that only people in showbiz had to deal with in the past. Self-representation, makeup, lighting, photography, charisma... All of those anxieties have now been applied to doctors, cleaners, teachers etc.

Although I love photographs, I personally find that saying, 'POIDH' (Pics or it didn't happen), terrifying because the happier I am the more I forget to document things, which makes me ask myself to what extent all of these situations 'don't count' because they are not 'out there' as images. I think that being alive today is to have to choose between 'existing' and 'not-existing' (via photo documentation); contrary to how it sounds, the second is less scary than the first, in my view.

Does your co-option of Instagram as an art space mean that you see 'outside' of it, critically? You see it as a system? In relation to what?

In this case, yes, it was for me a playground, a game where I cheated. But I could have never done this without the experience – perhaps guilt - of being part of the system myself. I'm never critical from the outside but more from within. I'm most critical of me as a product of capitalism.

To what extent does immersion (imaginative, social) in online media and hand-held technology affect your sense of real-time and space, and your own body? We are so often, nowadays, sucked in to the screen, checking social media feeds, likes, followers: the micro details that are heavily formatted in order to process and give a frame to human activity that actually feeds them. To what extent do you consider the nuances of the capacities or structures of this format as being an interesting or relevant part of your work? Or is it really just about images, and Instagram as a vehicle for image presentation?

Well, I have been good at not caring too much about the reactions on a personal level. Nevertheless, I do look at numbers etc. because it is related to the work – people's reactions,

their feedback, is part of the narratives, but I only check it once every two days or so. I wouldn't consider myself sucked in to the screen. With age I've become less able to have reactions to comments and likes, which is good for my head but bad for business, because ultimately the system we live in celebrates it. And because of that, I would never say that Instagram is just a vehicle for images, it is more a platform for images to be sold.

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