

TECHNO- FEMINISM(S):

AN INVESTIGATION INTO CHALLENGING PATRIARCHAL HEGEMONY IN NEW MEDIA ART

SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE MASTERS DEGREE OF
FINE ART IN THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND DESIGN AT THE
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Figure 1 . Untitled. 2019. King, S. (Hand Drawn Illustration)

DECLARATION

I, Sarah Ashleigh Kieswetter, hereby declare that this dissertation, except where indicated in the text, is my own work and has not been submitted in part, or in whole, at any other University or University of Technology. This practice-based research was conducted in Durban KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, and registered at the Durban University of Technology under the supervision of Mr Greg Streak and Dr Rachel Matteau Matsha.

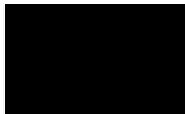


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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to use my own practice to explore patriarchal hegemony in new media art, and its relationship with technology (in this case the internet) through a feminist lens. In this research, the term 'patriarchal hegemony' refers to the internet/social media being an inherently male-dominated and controlled space. The theoretical framework is informed by theories from cultural studies addressed through a feminist scope. Furthermore, this study sought to critically analyse how techno-feminist (digitally driven and online feminist activism) artists and activists use technology, the internet, and social media as new innovative platforms. This feminist activism seeks to disrupt and create awareness of the dominant patriarchal hegemonic thinking within contemporary society (Morgan 2017:11). I used my own art practice as a point of departure to investigate techno-feminism and also conducted research on the work of other selected feminist artists who use their digital presence to articulate their media-based art activism. In addition, I critiqued how internet GIFs can be used as visual mechanisms to create awareness of patriarchal hegemony and propose alternatives.

PREFACE

The following conventions have been applied in this dissertation:

The DUT Harvard referencing system.

Double indentations and single spacing indicate direct quotations.

" - " used for direct quotations within a sentence.

' - ' used to indicate titles of publications.

Illustrations are referred to both by their figure numbers and the titles of the works they depict.

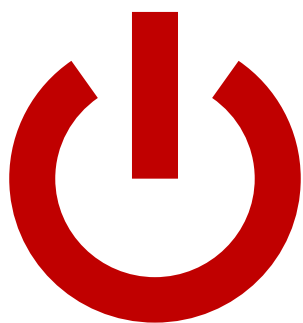
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INTRODUCTION

This Master's research is a practice-based enquiry which comprises a detailed written reflective account of the evolution of my art practice, artworks and their theoretical underpinnings through the three-year duration of this study. The purpose of this written document / dissertation is to situate my creative practice within a societal and art historical context. This document does not follow a traditional thesis format from 'Post 2' with separate chapters; rather, the theoretical framework, methods and research design are embedded in the discussion of the works themselves. The methodology is briefly discussed on pages 17-19.

This dissertation contextualises the final exhibition of artefacts and makes use of a reflexive and reflective journal that took the form of an online blog on a site called 'Behance' that can be found at <https://www.behance.net/sakieswetter>. These two elements (blog and artworks) made up the practical component of this study. This creative study was a transformative journey that provided me with greater understanding of the importance of how and why I identify myself and the artwork that I create as feminist. I am aware of the complexities of this politically loaded term and must note that this is not a dissertation on feminism; I briefly discuss the history and development of the waves of feminism(s) but do not go into detail. Rather, I focus on discussing how the process of researching feminism(s) helped to shift the study/art practice forward.

In the field of fine art, it is acknowledged that the process follows an emergent design. According to Pailthorpe (2017:1), emergent design is a qualitative research approach that refers to one's ability to adapt one's research to new concepts, ideas, and findings that occur throughout the course of the study. This was evident in my art practice; as my artwork evolved, I gained more insight into my chosen topic. Through the process of critical reflection and writing regular blog posts I was able to retain a detailed written account of when these changes took place. The blog was initially conceived of as an additional feature that would add to my body of work, but it quickly became a central element of this study. It represented the process of critical reflection that provided the foundation for the research, generation of ideas and for

the artworks created. This blog was created on a site dedicated to creatives (Behance) and is entitled 'Sarah Kieswetter: Reflective and Reflexive Fine Art Masters Journal'. It provides informal written posts that speak to the practical/theoretical work conducted and is thus both a reflective and reflexive online journal.

This dissertation highlights the central role that my blog played in my research. More than just a practical component of the study, it is a conceptual emergent site in which the digital techno-feminist themes and subjects in this study are explored and is a site where the theoretical and practical components merge. This dissertation, which simultaneously draws from and builds on this online platform is similarly written in the format of a blog. The posts are in chronological order and they unpack how this study unfolded

OUTLINE OF DISSERTATION		
POST ONE	➔	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • THE BACKGROUND/ BEGINNING • FEMINIST FRAMEWORK: PAYING MY HOMAGE • CONTEXT OF RESEARCH • AIMS AND OBJECTIVES • RESEARCH METHODOLOGY • DELIMITATIONS OF STUDY
POST TWO	➔	THE INTERNET AS A GENDERED SPACE CREATED ON 9 APRIL 2019
POST THREE	➔	HOW FEMINIST ART ACTIVISTS USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO CHALLENGE THE INTERNET AS A GENDERED SPACE: CREATED ON 26 JULY 2019
POST FOUR	➔	MY LAPTOP AS MY STUDIO: TECHNO-FEMINIST VIRTUAL STUDIO PRACTICES CREATED ON 5 AUGUST 2019
POST FIVE	➔	MY BLOG AND INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT AS AN ACADEMIC RESEARCH OUTPUT CREATED ON THE 19TH AUGUST 2019
POST SIX	➔	PRELIMINARY ART: THE START OF MY ART-MAKING PROCESS CREATED 3 SEPTEMBER 2019
POST SEVEN	➔	THE FINAL ARTWORKS CREATED 1 OCTOBER 2019
POST EIGHT	➔	THE CONCLUSION CREATED 15 OCTOBER 2019

Figure 2 .2019.Outline of Dissertation. Kieswetter. S. (Image)

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**THE
BACKGROUND
/BEGINNING**

POST ONE

CREATED ON 5 FEBRUARY 2019

THE BACKGROUND/ BEGINNING

Throughout my studies, I have been interested in feminism(s) and I knew that, for this MFA project, I wanted to create artwork from this perspective. My art practice during my undergraduate studies was initially restricted to 'traditional high art' disciplines including drawing, printmaking, painting, sculpture, and ceramics. According to Grajewski (2015), these disciplines are not only euro-centric, but have a long history of being male-dominated, with art practices which do not fit into them often relegated to the realm of 'low art' and often being perceived as stereotypically feminine or meant for women. My art practice during my BTech studies sought to undermine and break free from the restrictive barriers of these 'traditional' art disciplines. Despite being registered for Printmaking during my BTech studies, I consciously chose to use my art practice to disrupt these 'masculine' disciplines through my use of sewing and other forms of feminine craft artistic mediums. This study, and my use of various digital mediums and tools, was a continuation of my disruption and subversion of the 'masculine' dominated disciplines and norms that persist.

I consider myself to be a digital native, a term coined by Marc Prensky in 2001. According to Dingli and Seychell (2015:13), it is used to describe an individual who was born in the age of technology and who uses new technologies and the internet in her/his daily life. As a digital native, I am familiar with digital technologies and systems, the most conventional being my laptop and mobile phone. These devices offered media-rich learning sites that aided my academic practice primarily in terms of conducting and documenting research. However, they also offer additional possibilities to artists such as myself and can be used as tools to create artworks, as was discovered during the course of my research when my laptop became my physical art studio for my practice.

For this study, I aimed to produce digital art and distribute the works online, bypassing the traditional studio space. Digital art, which was first recognised in the 1980s, can be described as artworks that are generated, presented and facilitated using digital technologies (Tate 2019). If disseminated on online/social media, it can be interactive and thus requires a digital presence, for example on social media sites like Instagram/ Behance where the audience is able to engage with the works through the commenting, liking and sharing functions available on such sites.

Having not obtained formal education in digital art, I decided to teach myself. This medium needed to conceptually link into one of the contemporary facets of feminism(s) which is described by bell hooks as: “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression” (hooks 2000: viii). Feminism is often spoken about in the context of its four waves (Ovi 2017:1) from which multiple subcategories of feminism stem. Acknowledging the multifaceted aspect of feminism(s), I refer to feminism in its plural form throughout this dissertation. Furthermore, as a feminist artefact, the dissertation adopts alternative and inclusive spellings of the words ‘woman/men’ to ‘womxn’ as a symbol of resistance against the monolithic and male associations (woMAN/MEN) that the original spelling holds (Ashlee, Zamora, and Karikari 2017:102). However, the spelling substitution is not used when referring to the first to third waves of feminism as the substitution was not conceived yet in the 1960's and came about in 2010.

The research was inscribed in the context of fourth wave feminism(s) which focuses on techno-feminism(s). I discovered that issues of gender and patriarchal hegemony within the field of techno-feminism(s) are not necessarily associated with the art world. Through my practical and theoretical work, I explored and addressed the links between patriarchal hegemony, techno-feminism(s) and digital art.

FEMINIST FRAMEWORK: PAYING MY HOMAGE

This post highlights the feminist framework of this study and provides more insight into the four waves of feminism(s). In doing so, it pays homage to those who came

before and looks at how they paved the way for the techno-feminist(s) movement in which my work was inscribed. It also offers a brief critical reflection on how and why this history is important to my artmaking.

Fourth-wave feminism emerged in 2008 and is mainly informed by new technologies, social media, and the internet (Baumgardner 2011). Although Wajcman coined the term in 2004, techno-feminism(s) registers itself in the fourth wave and is the strand of feminism(s) that this study focused on due to its technical/digital nature. In order to understand the fourth wave, a brief exploration of its precursors is necessary, as they also inspired my art making.

First-wave feminism emerged in the 1960s (Rampton 2015) and was not necessarily an art movement, although in this dissertation, it is investigated within this context. The documentary, *!WAR* (Hershman 2010) explores first and second-wave feminism(s) from a visual art perspective (Figure 3).

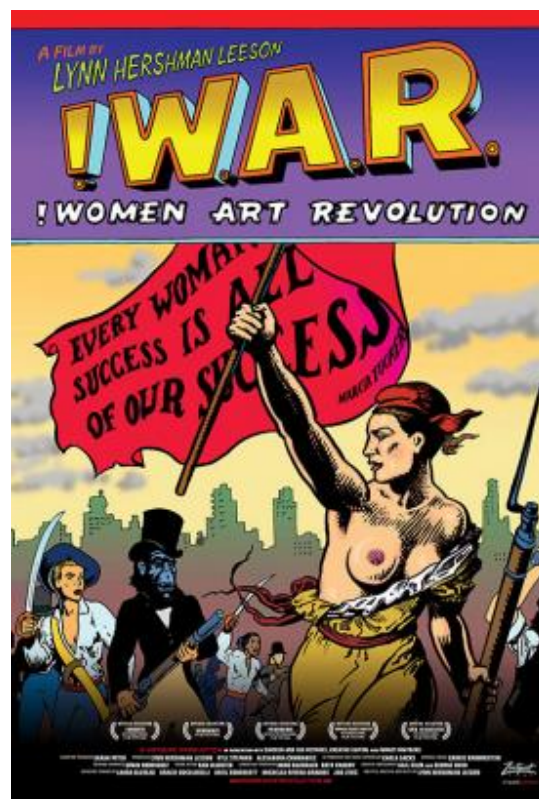


Figure 3 *!WAR*. 2010. L, Hershman. (Documentary Poster)

This film was a source of inspiration for my art practice as it aided me visually in understanding feminist art and provided insight into the techniques that the featured artists used. Some of these techniques were used in my final artworks.

The documentary states that first-wave feminism(s) emerged in the United States (US) where politics, race, gender, and art merged in a fight for equality. In 1968 a group of female artists formed a cohort called '!WAR', an acronym for Women Art Revolution (Hersman 2010). The cohort is significant as it provided a foundation for women artists, many of whom felt excluded from the art world, to come together and share their work. In the film, Judy Chicago, a young feminist American artist who is today considered an icon, stated that she felt alone as there were no other visible female artists; nor did she feel that her work was taken seriously during the late 1960s/ early 1970s. This statement was backed up by art historian Arlen Raven who stated that women artists would need to be comfortable with the idea of not being taken as seriously as their male counterparts (Hersman 2010).

In the first-wave, women artists and curators in the US began to challenge these notions through their works which mainly comprised of performance art, video, ceramics, multimedia, and even their own bodies, a deliberate move away from traditional male-dominated art mediums. However, a major shortcoming of first-wave feminism was that it was predominantly white and non-inclusive. This led to second-wave feminism that occurred from the late 1960s to the 1990s and “drew in women of colour and developing nations seeking sisterhood and solidarity claiming women’s struggles as a class struggle” (Rampton 2008: 1), feminism became more ‘Intersectional’. Intersectionality is a term that was formally coined in academic discourse by Kimberlé Crenshaw, in 1989, Crenshaw explains this term in the feminist context as “a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other” (Steinmetz 2020). In simple terms second wave- feminism became inclusive and started to actively fight for equality for the minorities.

During this time the feminist art movement started to become more confrontational in its stance against inequality and patriarchal control and staged protests (Figure 4)

(Hershman 2010). Photography (Figure 4) was one of the prominent artistic mediums used by female artists during the second-wave to expose and make public protests against male/white-dominated galleries in the art world. This led to female artists finally being given the chance to exhibit their works and be represented in galleries, with Judy Chicago being one such artist.



Figure 4 .Whitney Museum Protests. 1971. (Photograph)

In March 1979 Chicago exhibited her iconic controversial work 'The Dinner Party' at the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco (Figures 5 & 6). This artwork is a

monument to women's accomplishments and history. A large-scale installation, it depicts a large triangular table with each side measuring 48 feet. On this table are 39 place settings that commemorate prominent women in history, both mythical and real, including the primordial Goddess, Hatshepsut, Ishtar, and Theodora as well as the names of writers and artists like Emily Dickinson, Georgia O'Keeffe and Virginia Woolf (Figure 6) (Klein n.d.). Alongside these place settings, 999 names of other women are referenced. Each place setting is made up of a goblet, utensils, and an embroidered table runner with the name of the woman to which that specific setting is dedicated and topped with a ceramic plate that resembles the shape of female genitalia, a controversial element of the work as well as its focal point (Klein n.d.). According to Klein (n.d.), Chicago created the artwork with the aim of making a political statement that spoke against inadequate documentation of women in the art world and history in comparison to their male counterparts. Along with the artwork, Chicago published a book under the same title and a film entitled 'Right Out of History: The Making of the Dinner Party.' in order to 'properly' document the women and their accomplishments that are represented in the work, as if Chicago is attempting to re-inscribe them into history (Klein n.d.).



Figure 5. 1979. The Dinner Party. J. Chicago. (Mixed Media)



Figure 6.1979. The Dinner Party. Chicago, J. (Close Up Image)

Chicago's dinner party was exhibited in an established art institution and gave rise to much controversy. According to Donato (1981), many galleries refused to show it due to its sexual nature, with art critics claiming that "the piece was not art at all, but rather an historical-political display and/or, even worse, self-aggrandizement: a giant extravaganza to feed what has been described as the massive ego of Judy Chicago" (Danto 1981). Critic Robert Dornan went further and asserted that the work is "3-D ceramic pornography". Chicago refuted these claims and stated that the artwork is a feminist artefact. Even though feminism had moved forward, and women artists gained more representation during the second wave, their works were still contested and discriminated against by galleries and critics. Although Chicago's work was embedded in the second wave, Crawford (2019 para. 1 line 7) states that her ideas laid the foundations that inspired the rise of third-wave feminism(s).

Third-wave feminism started in the 1990s and was informed by post-colonial and post-modern thinking. Third-wave feminists and artists such as 'The Guerrilla Girls' felt that women were still oversexualised and objectified within artworks (Lindsay 2017). In 1985, an anonymous art activist group was formed in New York to address these issues. Known as The Guerrilla Girls, it was made up of seven radical female feminists who hid their identities by wearing gorilla masks (Figure 7) and who aimed to fight the patriarchy prevalent in the art world (Lindsay 2017). This group and their artworks are discussed in detail later in this dissertation.



Figure 7.2013. The Guerrilla Girls. (Photograph)

Interestingly, while the first, second and third waves of feminisms seemed to critique / challenge the same issue of patriarchal control within the art world, they did so through traditional forms of activism. These issues remain a central point of discussion in the fourth-wave, with the main difference being that unequal power dynamics have been transferred to digital spaces and the style of activism has now

evolved to become digital. Through my art practice I further critiqued and explored the power imbalances that our patriarchal society imposes on the art world and social media.

In conclusion, the adoption of a feminist theoretical framework for this study was informed by my interest in producing digital art as well as my understanding of feminist history. My practice and reflection were underpinned by the fourth-wave feminism(s) and the assumption that the internet is a gendered space.

CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

This section defines the main concepts used in this dissertation in the context of art. In doing so, it becomes evident how these concepts influenced and shaped my creative practice.

This practice-based research (PBR) was underpinned by the assumption that patriarchal hegemony is exercised in new media art, on the World Wide Web and on social media (Wajcman 2013). The internet is the largest physical network of computers and devices in the world, and the World Wide Web is the virtual network of websites on the computer servers of the internet (the network) (Goodwill Community Foundation 2013:3). The World Wide Web is the platform for social media, which is defined as online communicative media content that is created and controlled by the user (and made available to the public) (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010:61).

Patriarchy can be described as an unequal social system in which men hold authority and which subordinates, oppresses and discriminates against womxn (Facio 2013:1). In 'Prison Notebooks', Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci defines hegemony as the process of dominance and subordination and how the dominant ruling class (in this case, men) use and maintain power to influence and control society (Gramsci 1971:20). According to Judy Wajcman (2013:7), "Mastery over technology has long been seen as a key source of power for men"; this statement can be extended to the web and, thus,

social media. In the context of this research the term 'patriarchal hegemony' refers to the belief that the internet and social media are inherently male-dominated and controlled spaces. It is assumed to occur in a cycle (Figure 8); hence it needs to be constantly challenged in order to disrupt it.

Stuart Hall asserts that, "it is crucial to the concept that hegemony is not a 'given' and permanent state of affairs, but it has to be actively won and secured, it can also be lost" (Hall 1977:333). In line with Hall's advice, I critically examined how artists, through their works, seek to challenge the patriarchal system; how social media can be used as a platform to do so; and how this was exemplified through my own art practice.

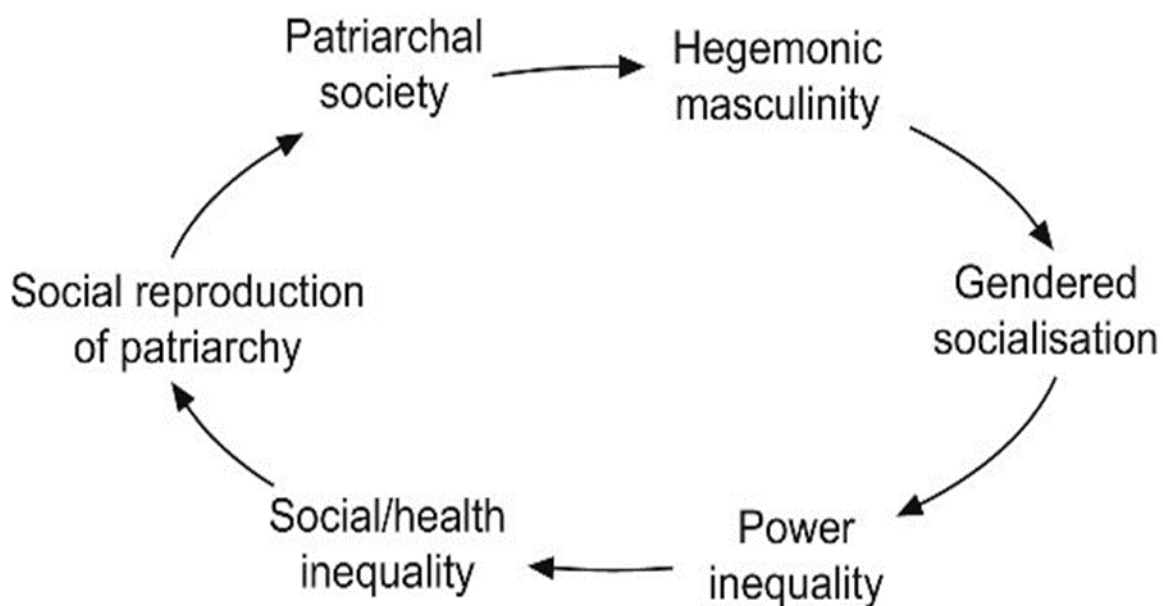


Figure 8 .2019. Model of Hegemonic Masculinity. Olson, J. (Online Image)

In the modern techno-centric society, the internet and social media have influenced the way artists create their work. McHugh (2011:5) states that art evolves on par with the internet and technology. The internet and social media have provided a "distribution platform, a machine for altering and rechannelling work" (McHugh

2011:5). Within this movement, issues of gender and hegemony are flourishing (Paul 2016) and attracted my interest as an aspiring techno-feminist artist. Through my art practice, I explored how/ why feminist artists can and do use social media as a new platform to emancipate themselves and how this can be achieved by using social media sites like Instagram to gain a much larger audience through connecting with people online.

My art practice and reflexion thereon sought to critically analyse how techno-feminist (digitally driven and online feminist activism) artists and activists use technology, the internet, and social media as new innovative platforms. This form of feminist activism seeks to disrupt and create awareness of the dominant patriarchal hegemonic thinking within contemporary society (Morgan 2017:11). In addition, I examined the work and backgrounds of three artists, The Guerrilla Girls (US, New York City), Judy Chicago (US) and Jennifer Chan (Canada) and reflected on how their use of their digital presence to articulate their media-based art activism inspired my practice.

My art practice was a point of departure for this investigation and critique of patriarchal hegemony and techno-feminism. I achieved this by providing detailed reflections drawing on my lived experiences as a white South African female. Using new media art and techno-feminism, my work was created digitally on a computer using editing software while my reflective and reflexive journal is an online blog, with some works disseminated on an Instagram account. I reflected on these experiences and positioned my work in the techno-feminist new media art realm. Social media was a relevant platform as it is in line with techno-feminist techniques that aim “to make online spaces hospitable to women’s social, professional, and political goals” (Grimes and Hidalgo n, d:1). Having a digital presence helps to position the works created in the category of techno-feminist art and also strengthens their conceptual underpinning as, posting one's work on social media bypasses the gallery system that this study also critiques. Photoshop was used as my primary medium and is discussed later in this dissertation.

Figure 9 shows a mind map I created early in this study, outlining the plan for the research.

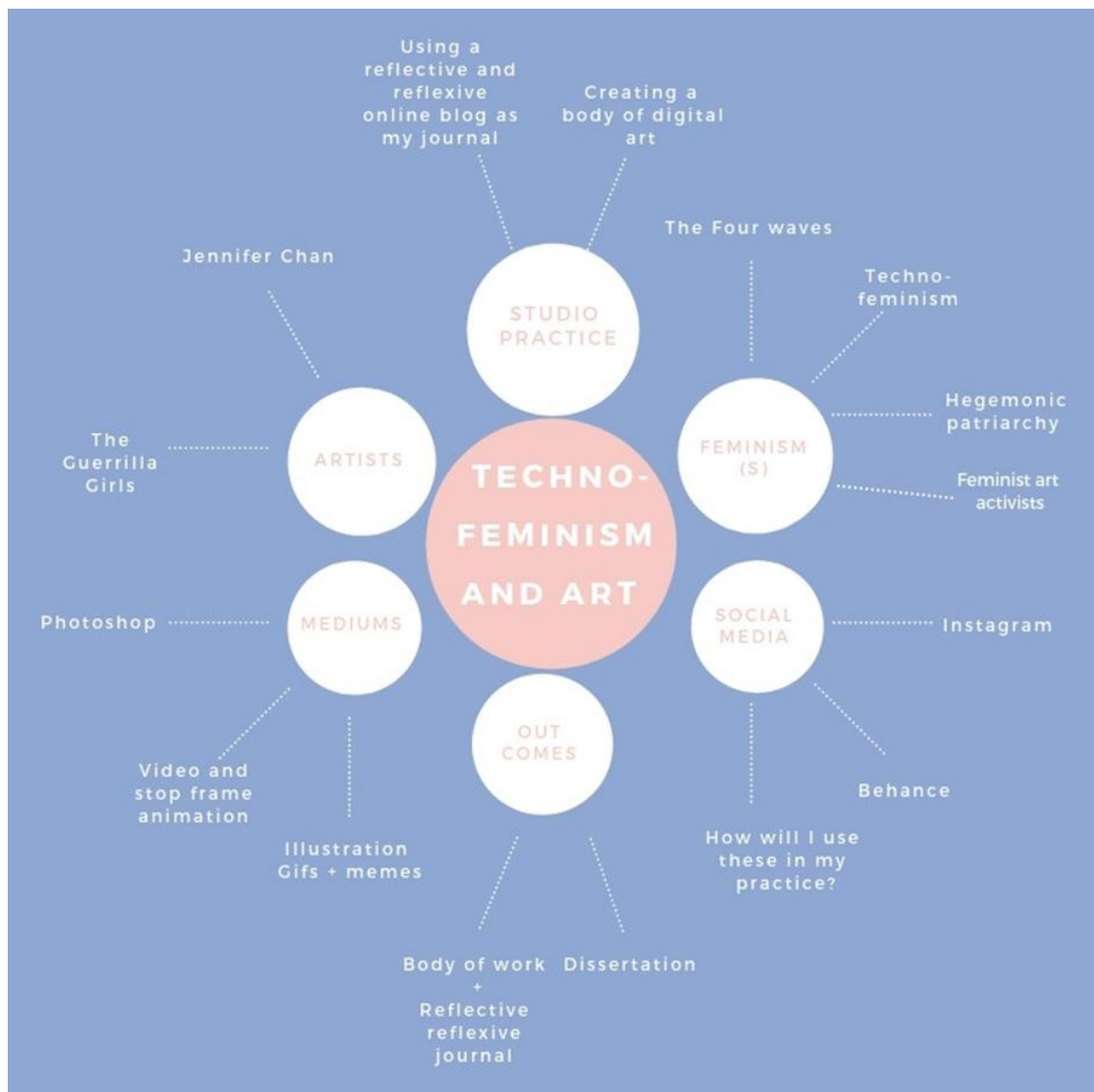


Figure 9 .Mind Map of Study. Kieswetter, S. (Digital Media)

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

As this study is PBR, the practical and theoretical processes are integrated. Cultural communication researcher Linda Candy defines PBR as:

an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice. In a thesis, claims of originality and contribution to knowledge may be demonstrated through creative outcomes in the form of designs, music, digital media, performances and exhibitions. Whilst the significance and context of the claims are described in words, a full understanding can only be obtained with direct reference to the outcomes (Candy 2006:1).

Hence, I used my art practice as an investigative tool to analyse and critique patriarchal hegemony and techno-feminism in new media art. The study also sought to engage in a conversation about the works and techniques used by selected feminist female artists through a techno-feminist lens.

AIM:

The aim of this study was to explore, challenge and create awareness of patriarchal hegemony on the internet.

MAIN OBJECTIVES:

- To create my own body of techno-feminist digitally-driven artworks.
- To create an online blog on 'Behance', which also served as my reflective and reflexive journal.
- To explore how social media can create a platform to distribute and exhibit artwork.
- To critically reflect on the processes and the outcome of my final artworks.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research methods used in this study. It also provides a justification for their use.

The production and curation of creative artefacts for this study were based on the PBR methodology and my primary sources of data were thus obtained through my art practice, the artworks that I created and my reflective and reflexive journal as well as through social media statistics. The secondary data consisted of books, journals, films, documentaries, and other online sources. A qualitative approach was thus adopted. According to Denzin, Norman, and Lincoln (2000), qualitative research uses data that is not experimentally measured or examined in terms of its frequency, amount or quantity. This form of research is more subjective than objective and focuses on how definitions, academic texts, concepts, theories, opinions, and motives, provide insight and understanding of the chosen focus of the study. Practice-based research refers to the process that follows the cycle of create, reflect, and act, whereby theory and practice are integrated and do not occur on a linear basis.

The study followed the interpretivist paradigm and relativism as its ontological approach. Interpretive research approaches are based on observations of human actions and social constructions as well as analysis of existing texts and artefacts, thus creating a dialogue between the researcher (myself) and other scholars in the same field, in order to create new subjective understanding (Maron 2011:2). Relativism posits that there are multiple truths and that reality is dependent on one's lived experiences (Robson 2002:22). The study was based on my own lived experiences as a young aspiring female techno-feminist artist and as such was subjective, which was further understood through the process of critical reflection. I offer insight into how this research shaped my position and identity, how it influenced my creative process as an artist and the possible outcomes of such practice, both for myself and other artists in the same field.

Practice-based research is often seen as an alternative and contested form of knowledge generation in that it does not conform to traditional research methods even though it is widely accepted within the creative arts (Candy and Edmonds 2016:1). In the context of my study, the creation of the artefacts and the artefacts themselves played a vital role in understanding the topic on which this study focused, namely, techno-feminism(s) and the critique of new media.

According to Candy (2016:2), the term 'practice' in the context of research in fine art mainly refers to the process of how an artefact is made by the artist, the transformation of ideas and the process of how these new ideas then lead the artist to create a generation of new artworks. The term 'research' in its most basic form can then be described as a systemic investigation to test theories, reach new understandings or establish facts (Candy 2016:2). As an artist, research plays a vital role in my everyday art practice as it enables me to gain more understanding and knowledge of each individual artwork that I make, and the making process provides further opportunities for reflection, exploration, and evaluation. Practice-based research in the context of fine art follows an emergent design. The artefacts and the research evolve during the course of the study and these changes need to be documented. In my case the theories used did not change, but my artworks and the ways that I created them did. These changes were documented as they occurred in my reflexive journal and they are critically reflected on in this dissertation.

Although my art practice and the artefacts are the most integral part of this study, they cannot speak for themselves and do not stand alone. They need to be reflected on, critiqued and backed up by theories in order for them to be contextualised in the field of fine art. These reflections accompany my final exhibition, and this dissertation should be read in conjunction with my reflective and reflexive journal (blog) and my artwork (exhibited artefacts).

DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is a practice-based enquiry that was driven by the creation of a body of artworks that were informed by feminist theories and were inspired by my own lived experience as a womxn, to which the written dissertation is closely linked. Thus, both the theoretical and practical content is subjective. Furthermore, my research into social media only focused on two sites, namely Instagram and Behance.

HOW TIS FOR

**THE
INTERNET AS
A GENDERED
SPACE**

POST TWO: THE INTERNET AS A GENDERED SPACE

CREATED ON 9 APRIL 2019

This post explores how social media can be considered as a gendered space and how the cycle of patriarchal hegemony exists in both our physical and online worlds in the context of art. I reflect on my experiences of using the internet and discuss the notion that the internet and social media have become an extension of the self, as well as how this has impacted my creative practice.

The term 'hegemony' is attributed to Gramsci who described it as the process of dominance and subordination by a ruling class (Gramsci 1971:20). Gramsci's notion of hegemony provides the foundation on which patriarchal hegemony is based. Building on Gramsci, Hall states that "hegemony is dominance and subordination in the field of relations structured by power" (Hall 1985 cited in Lull 1995:33). Furthermore, Hall argues that due to technology, forms of social domination have become more complex than ever before (Lull 1995:1). This is especially true in the 21st century, when social media and the internet are potent and persuasive ideological mediums (Penney 2017:16). This point is particularly important when analysing how hegemonic systems play out and reinforce their power over the user. Boggs (1976:39) states that "Mass Media are elite tools that ruling elites use to perpetuate their power". American philosopher and political activist Cornell West applies the concept of hegemony to gender theory and writes that "hegemony relates to cultural dominance in societies. Within that overall framework there are specific gender relations of dominance and subordination" (Schippers 2007:87). These seminal theories of hegemony are mainly applied to the physical world. Gramsci was writing during a time where the internet and online spaces did not exist. Although the medium has changed (print -> electronic -> digital) the contestation of power is the same.

As a digital native, I consider my digital presence to be an extension of the self as I believe that my physical and digital worlds are inseparable. Case observes that "We are entering a new phase of technological evolution, a phase where the Internet will be fully integrated into every part of our lives – how we learn, how we work..."

(2016:47). Braidotti (Mace 2017), a post-humanist feminist, asserts that technology and the internet (media) is the “philosophy of today”, in that we are embedded and embodied by it as “media is your life, it is who you are and there is no way to detach from it” (Mace 2017). While this could be regarded as a radical notion, I agree with it, as all facets of my life are directly tethered to the online world and the devices linked to it (mobile phone, laptop). I use the internet academically, recreationally, as a tool for communication and now as a digital art studio and personal gallery.

The idea of the internet being an extension of the self can extend to the use of social media such as Instagram, where one documents, shares and distributes lived moments in one’s life by posting photos and videos (Ganda 2014). These sites and others on the internet create an online community where users can actively participate in one another’s online lives as they are able to comment, like and share one another’s posts. Thus, the online platform becomes a place where users enjoy freedom of speech (Granda 2014). Through these online interactions and on the internet, the cycle of patriarchal hegemony plays itself out.

Social media and image-based sites like Instagram were used in my art practice as alternative spaces to explore and discover new artists and artworks that inspired my practice, rather than sourcing works through galleries, exhibition openings, books, and academic websites. Many of the artists on Instagram are not established within the context of the art world and self-publish their works on sites that are open to all. A quick browse on Instagram reveals that womxn are often sexually harassed online; this can be seen in the comments section. A local South African news article noted that an unnamed creative received a comment on one of her posts that stated, “I would love your artwork but it’s your bum I want” (Drenten, Gurrierl and Tyler 2019 para. 14 line 1). Comments like these perpetuate the patriarchal hegemonic ideals of toxic masculinity that are common in the physical world in online spaces.

Wajcman argues that technology and the internet are inherently gendered and are preconceived to be masculine. They thus misrepresent womxn and promote the common stereotype that womxn are consumers rather than creators of such

technology. In some cases, they are objectified to become its content (hypersexualized womxn) (Wajcman 2007). The internet can be considered as a microcosm of society, where social media and sites like Instagram expose the best and worst aspects of people and society, as “They reflect the systemic violence and oppression of the society in which we live in the form of racism, sexism, and many more forms of discrimination “(Roux 2015:40–42). This is further emphasised by artist Jennifer Chan (2015 para. 7 line 2) who said, “once you reveal yourself to be a female-identified user, people treat you like one”.

Reflecting on the above alongside my experience as a female user of the internet and social media, and as a female artist, I conclude that I experience the internet to be a gendered space. Yet, social media provides a space where artists, through disseminating their works online, can challenge and raise awareness of patriarchal hegemony.

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HOW
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POST THREE: HOW FEMINIST ART ACTIVISTS USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO CHALLENGE THE INTERNET AS A GENDERED SPACE

CREATED ON 26 JULY 2019

This post discusses various examples of how feminist artists use the internet and their social media presence as strategies to challenge patriarchal hegemony. It illustrates how I adopted these artists' strategies in my own practice. The first section describes and defines the concept of online anonymity in relation to The Guerrilla Girls and Banksy. This is followed by an exploration of two curators who created an online exhibition that inspired my work. Finally, I analyse how The Guerrilla Girls subvert gallery spaces through their artworks and how their techniques inspired my practice. To reiterate, techno-feminism(s) is a movement that inscribes itself in the fourth wave that critiques the relationship that technology and online spaces have with gender.

From the inception of this study, I assumed that the internet is an autonomous space. This reasoning was based on the notion that the internet is an environment where one can own and control one's online spaces such as social media accounts, websites and email accounts. Hence, the belief that the internet would provide a space that is more gender inclusive. This claim is contested by Kee's (2019 para. 4-5) assertion that online spaces are dictated by offline realities and that gender-based discrimination and masculine bias are hidden under the language of technical neutrality that is used to describe the internet. Thus, although online spaces offer more possibilities for artists, issues of gender remain that need to be highlighted and challenged.

Initially, I was of the view that anonymity could enable female artists and myself to circumvent the issue of the internet being biased towards patriarchal hegemony. Feminist artists and activists can exploit the autonomous nature of the internet to their benefit, as it can provide a platform where individuals can be anonymous (more specifically genderless and nameless, making their artwork more successful). This is not a new notion and has been explored by artists and authors.

Banksy, a British street artist, painter and activist, is one such artist who has successfully hidden their real-world identity. Banksy's artworks are subversive and political, and often critique the traditional way the art world functions. In a comment to the Smithsonian Museum Banksy (Jones 2013 para. 3 line 4-9) stated:

You don't have to go to college, drag 'round a portfolio, mail off transparencies to snooty galleries or sleep with someone powerful, all you need now is a few ideas and a broadband connection. This is the first time the essentially bourgeois world of art has belonged to the people. We need to make it count.

In this quotation, Banksy reaffirms the possibilities that the internet offers artists by making reference to a broadband connection and hints at the techno-feminist notion that the internet is a more inclusive place than the gallery. Perhaps Banksy chooses anonymity and a pseudonym as a way to create controversial works that enable him/her to avoid censorship, persecution and political repression. Yet issues of gender bias affect this artist. While Banksy is commonly referred to as a male and as an individual, there are theories that Banksy could be a female or even a collective of artists working under one pseudonym (Munro 2014).

I initially felt that choosing to remain anonymous or using a pseudonym would create an environment where the artwork would be seen on its own, and not be tied to its maker. For example, the feminist art activist group The Guerrilla Girls wears masks to hide their identities and uses pseudonyms. They work under the names of famous deceased female artists who inspired them, and the three founding members call themselves Frida Kahlo, Käthe Kollwitz, and Zubeida Agha. Similar to Banksy, The Guerrilla Girls choose to remain anonymous due to the controversial subject matter of their artwork. One of the group members remarked that "we really thought we were dealing with dangerous stuff" (Chave 2012:20). They added that they did not want the nature of their work to affect their personal careers, as many of the members are studio artists and academics under their real identities. They stated that "we wanted the focus ... not to be on our personalities or own work" (Chave 2011:110) but on the collective.

When creating my practical work, the idea of working under a pseudonym online was an enticing option, but I was hesitant. I felt that this would not allow me to reclaim my space online and challenge the patriarchal hegemonic system that is at play both in the physical and online art worlds, I wanted my identity to be apparent.

I therefore conducted research on online feminist artists' strategies and came across an exhibition entitled "Body Anxiety" that took place in January 2015. Curated by Jennifer Chan a Canadian feminist digital artist/ curator and Leah Schrager an American feminist Instagram artist, the show comprised 21 underrepresented female new media artists' works that were exhibited online only. The artwork commented on the self-representation of womxn on the internet, with the aim of reclaiming the male-dominated space of the internet. This exhibition took place on a webpage (<http://bodyanxiety.com/gallery/landing/>) that was very plainly set out on a white background with black text, almost as if it was mimicking the walls of a gallery space (Figure 10). The subversion of the gallery space online can be seen as activism and an act of reclamation.

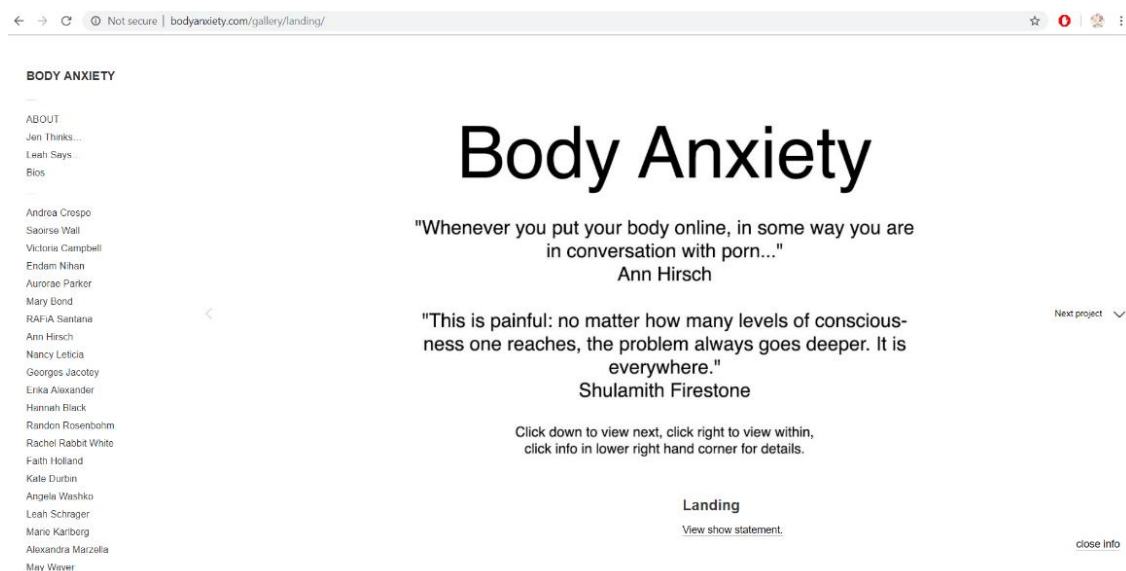


Figure 10. 2019. Body Anxiety Exhibition. Chan, J. (Screen Grab)

In the curatorial statement, Schrager stated that her desire to curate this exhibition stemmed from her “deep frustration” (Schrager 2015 para. 2 line 1) that “the art world is more likely to value women who ‘made art’ over women who ‘make art’” (Schrager 2015 para. 1 line 2-3). However, both curators felt that the internet and social media have the potential to offer opportunities for reclamation, subversion, and disruption of traditional attitudes towards gender.

The Body Anxiety exhibition inspired my art practice, both technically and conceptually. The website's minimal aesthetic was something that I adopted in my blog on Behance as I felt that this simplistic set up was easy for the user to navigate. Although my blog's aesthetic is bolder (Figure 11), I tried to keep in mind that, like the Body Anxiety's webpage, the overall look should be conceptually tied to the artwork that I make. My blog is discussed in detail in a later section.

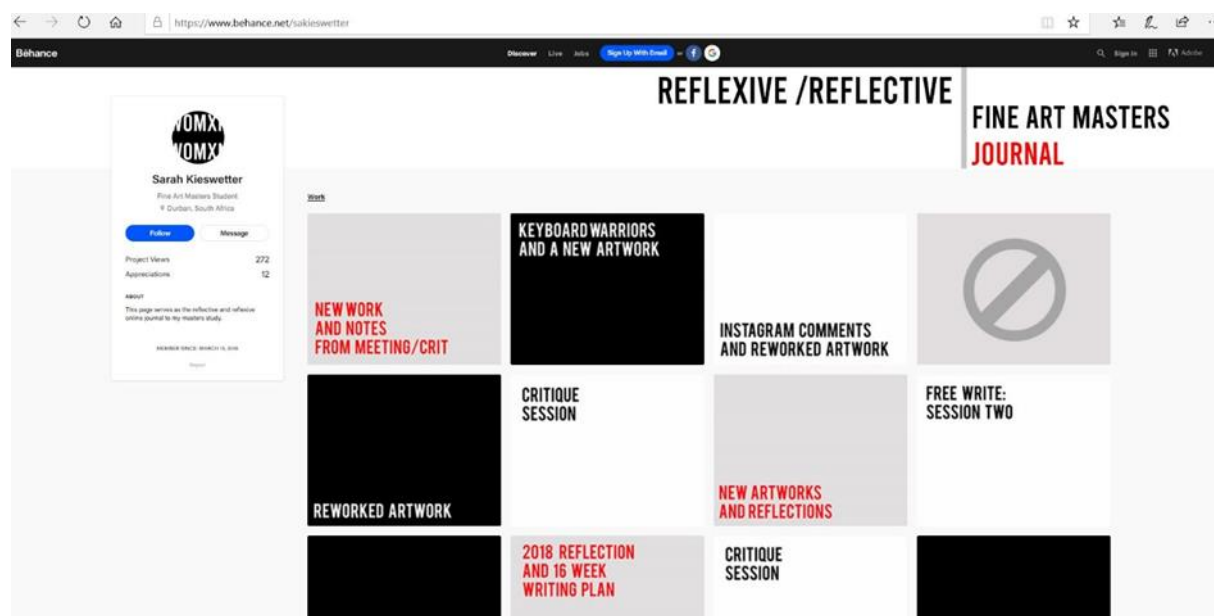


Figure 11. 2019. Reflexive and Reflective Journal. Kieswetter, S. (Screen Grab)

The Body Anxiety exhibition, and the way it was curated, shed light on how feminist female artists can use the internet to claim back their space and voices online. But what about the physical art world? How do feminist artists address patriarchal

hegemony and claim back their spaces within the confines of the gallery system, that is governed by patriarchal social systems? (Brown 2019:1).

The Guerrilla Girls have been challenging and highlighting issues relating to the patriarchal hegemonic gallery system since the group's inception in 1984 and continue to do so. Their mission is to expose sexism, inequality, and hegemony in the art world by using contemporary creative techniques, unlike the second and third-wave feminists who used picketing and demonstrations as ways of protesting. The Guerrilla Girls subvert the walls of physical gallery spaces and visually expose the discriminatory practices of the art world (Figure 12). More recently, the collective has also disseminated their works online. This is achieved by creating bold text centred posters and interactive artworks that highlight their findings based on research that the group has collected over the past 30 years. The data was compiled from existing secondary sources such as museum reports and articles. It is quantitative and consists of numerical statistics that expose named established galleries/ art institutions' representations of female artists, female solo exhibitions and artist who are people of colour in comparison to the number of male artists and male-created artworks presented by these institutions (Tate 2019). This can be seen in one of the collective's well-known billboard-sized posters (Figure 13).



Figure 12. 2016. Girls Behaving Badly. The Guerrilla Girls. (Photograph)



Figure 13. 1989. Do Women have to be Naked to get into the Met? The Guerrilla Girls. (Poster)

This poster points a critical finger (Figure 13) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, highlighting that womxn in the MET's exhibitions are more likely to be objectified and the subject matter of the artworks than the artists who create them.

What makes The Guerrilla Girls intriguing, is their ability to stay relevant. The collective has produced work for the past 30 years and continues to be prolific. The Guerrilla Girls marked the start of the third-wave, but their works have transcended this wave and have moved into the fourth-wave. They remain relevant by adapting and responding to changes in a critical way. This can be seen in their integration of social media and digital technology, on which the fourth-wave is based. The group also continues to build on collected data and has created a vast archive of information where they are able to track changes and express them visually through their artworks. This can be seen in Figure 14 in a more recent poster that they created, with the information updated to findings in 2015.



Figure 14. 2015. How many Women had Solo Shows at NYC Museums? Recount. The Guerrilla Girls. (Poster)

In analysing this artwork, it is evident that the issues that the collective have been challenging and highlighting (gender inequality), imply that patriarchal hegemony in the gallery system and by extension the art world persists. I am inspired by how the group has adapted their ways of making over the past 30 years from physical posters to online digital artwork and informatics. According to their website, 95% of their work is digitally created (Guerrilla Girls 2019) and it illustrates the impact that an online presence can have. In recent times the group has turned to social media and the internet as tools to showcase their work. They stated in an interview in 2016 that “now thanks to social media, our work can reach hundreds of thousands of people all over the world” (Emory 2016 para. 10 line 3-4).

Kemp (2019 para. 5 line 1-9) states that in 2019 there were 4.39 billion internet users worldwide and that 3.48 billion of those users have social media accounts which they use on a daily basis. Aleksandar (2019) notes that the average user spends about two hours 39 minutes on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and Pinterest a day which translates to 17 hours 13 minutes a week. Most users use these platforms for communication and to connect with broader society. These statistics highlight why social media has become an ideal platform for activism and the dissemination of art.

This notion of using social media for activism has been contested. Gregory (2019: 52-53) observes that some scholars have termed this form of online activism as keyboard activism, clicktivism or more prominently as 'Slacktivism'. This suggests that the internet and social media are rather used as tools for advocacy. It also insinuates that this form of activism is less effective in stimulating real social change and awareness, implying that offline traditional or standard forms of activism like physically protesting and picketing are more effective (Gregory 2019:52-53). Furthermore, it has been claimed that one cannot fully commit to activism online as one is not physically engaging with other likeminded people and "that activism online is too easy" (Gregory 2019:52).

The critique of online activism could be more nuanced. Firstly, our offline and online worlds are embedded within each other, as societal issues that occur within the one are also present in the other. Given that we live in a digital age, traditional forms of activism have adapted to suit the needs of the generation of digital natives. Furthermore, digital activism does not require participants to meet physically (Gregory 2019:52). This is not to underplay the power of physical interactions, but rather to state that the two have a symbiotic relationship. As the two worlds are embedded, digital activism should also lead to physical activism or vice versa. Secondly, social media provides a space where billions of people are able to connect. Therefore, through engaging online about social-political issues like gender inequality, for example, information/content is able to reach more people and travel

through society at a faster rate than physical actions or word of mouth. It could be argued that online and offline activism have the same aims and share the same end goals which are to educate people and raise awareness of a particular societal issue in order to encourage people to join and maintain social movements.

Several strategies are used both online and in the physical world by feminist art activists to challenge and create awareness of patriarchal hegemony. Researching these strategies offered insight into how they could be adopted in my art practice. Creating work both physically and digitally and having a social media presence offered the potential to provide me with suitable ways to reclaim my voice as a techno-feminist artist.

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**MY LAPTOP AS
MY STUDIO:
TECHNO-
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PRACTICES**

POST FOUR: MY LAPTOP AS MY STUDIO: TECHNO-FEMINIST VIRTUAL STUDIO PRACTICES

CREATED ON 5 AUGUST 2019

This post explores the notion of 'space' in relation to my studio practice. The idea of creating work outside a physical studio space is examined as well as the creation of digital artwork using my personal laptop and cell phone and how these mediums impacted the study's technological feminist conceptual framework.

Traditionally, an artist's practice has been perceived as either solitary by working alone in a small private studio space, or collaborative for those who are motivated by social environments (Budge 2013:1). Both types of studio practice are physical; as Budge (2013:3) states: "Traditionally studio practice has been real-time, face to face (or face to materials) experience in tangible, physical spaces".

From my first year in Fine Art I was provided with a shared studio space that I could use for my art practice. The idea of not having this physical space was something I never considered until undertaking this master's degree. The university provided a few studio spaces, but none were conducive to the creation of digital art, as they were more suited to creating works in the traditional art mediums of painting, printmaking, drawing, etc. that are taught. My preliminary works were done from home and were not completely digital as I was still teaching myself how to use Photoshop and was physically planning and sketching my artworks and thereafter digitalizing them. However, the other parts of my study were digital, as my reflexive and reflective journal is an online blog and I had also set up an Instagram page to disseminate my work. As my study progressed and my art practice started to evolve to become completely digital, I was able to make work anywhere and any place as long as I had my laptop and an internet connection. My laptop became my virtual art studio and the idea of space and creating art physically became of interest to me.

Although these were my main reasons for moving away from occupying a physical studio space in an academic environment, it promoted me to contemplate the concept

of 'space' in its entirety. What defines 'space'? What defines a 'place'? How are these sites linked to new media, techno-feminist art, and my own art practice?

In a book entitled 'Studio and Cube', Brian O'Doherty (2007:7) discusses similar questions and states that space is defined by the way in which it is used and by who occupies it: "Spaces obtain their meanings from social agreements, confirmed by usage". He adds that spaces and the way they are used have conceptual underpinnings and asserts that art studios carry their own social agenda. These agendas are influenced by the artist and the work that the artist creates within the space. Studio spaces can thus be regarded as creative sites. They should therefore be analysed as texts, as they provide insights into the artist's world, production process and the times in which they live (O'Doherty 2007:1). This concept is taken further by Yi-Fu Tuan (1977:3-5) who states that the 'space' in which the 'place' inscribes itself can be associated with specific parts and movements in culture.

A critical understanding of a studio space helps one to understand the context in which an artist lived and the art movement in which the artwork is inscribed. The notion of digitalized art practice is not new, as it is in line with new media artworks. The term new media "is used to describe the sophisticated new technologies that have become available to artists since the late 1980s that can enable the digital production and distribution of art" (Tate 2019). However, this movement is still contested and not fully accepted in the art world. Parsons (2019:14) notes that, "for art to be a part of fine art it has needed to fit into the conventional boundaries that tradition has set and that are accepted across all platforms". This stems from the belief that art has to be a physical object created in a traditional art medium and that art that doesn't conform to these boundaries can be categorised as "non-art" (Parsons 2019: 2). It speaks to the experience of The Guerrilla Girls, where it was debated whether or not their new media artworks could be considered art (Chave 2011:110).

Feminists and new media artists contest these hierarchies and state that the internet can be thought of as a new mass artistic medium (Chan 2012:107). Art does not have to be a physical object or be physically created in a traditional/physical studio space.

Using alternative contemporary practices, artists can challenge the power issues at play. Parsons (2019:10) posits that new media art can also be thought of as transcendental because this digital medium transcends the traditional studio and gallery space, traditional art mediums and the academic and institutional audience that fine art used to be tied too. He adds that “the places for new media art are everywhere and nowhere” (Parsons 2019:10).

Although online spaces can be gendered they still hold possibilities, moving away from the traditional norms of the art world can be considered as a feminist act as one is able to remove oneself from these male-dominated environments (mainly galleries) and move into an online place/ space that is more self-governed and inclusive. New media and feminist digital art are breaking down institutional controls and hierarchies. Chan (2012:108) observes that many new media/ digital artists are moving towards an entirely digital practice, from creation to exhibition, and regard this as a career move. Since the internet and social media networks provide spaces that artists can govern themselves, by being online, they are able to break down the hierarchy that is often associated with gallery spaces. Social media and internet platforms provide a space that is inclusive, accessible and relevant to pressing societal issues.

In reflecting on my art practice, it became evident that it was never my intention to not have a studio space. The challenge of finding an alternative studio space adequate to my needs benefitted my study. By not having a physical traditional studio space and by shifting that space onto my portable laptop, creating my own virtual studio, I could further challenge and subvert traditional ways/sites of creating work. Undertaking this research enabled me to further establish and place my study in the realm of new media techno-feminist art.

THIS

WAS

**MY
BLOG AND
INSTAGRAM
ACCOUNT AS
AN ACADEMIC
RESEARCH
OUTPUT**

POST FIVE: MY BLOG AND INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT AS AN ACADEMIC RESEARCH OUTPUT

CREATED ON 19 AUGUST 2019

This post focuses on the use of blogs and Instagram accounts for interactive, collaborative and reflective practice and these platforms' potential as learning spaces for postgraduate studies. I reflect on my experiences of using these platforms for the purposes of this study and for my art practice.

During a critique session in the early stages of this study (February 2017), I was presented with the idea of using a blog as my reflective and reflexive journal by my co-supervisor. The act of journaling has always been a central part of my creative process. A reflexive and reflective journal is a steadily growing document/tool which one uses to explore ideas. It can be considered as a qualitative tool in PBR. According to Ortlipp (2008:695), in the reflexive approach in journaling, "Researchers are urged to talk about themselves, 'their presuppositions, choices, experiences, and actions during the research process'" and the reflective aspect is where the researcher aims to make visible to the reader the outcomes of the research by critically documenting "the various choices and decisions researchers undertake during the process of researching" (Ortlipp 2008:695) or, in the context of this study, during the process of creating art. In simpler terms, the reflexive and reflective journal provides a transparent and subjective documentation and critical self-reflection of the research and artwork created throughout the duration of the study.

In the past my journals took the form of a physical book where I explored my creative process, mainly through mind maps, writing, and sketches. I was interested in the idea of this journal being digital as it resonated with the techno-feminist conceptual framework of my art practice. The word 'blog' is a contraction of the term 'web-logging' and is described as a form of micro-publishing by the user. A blog is an online collaborative space that is owned by its author and is an established form of online communicative tool where authors (bloggers) are able to write posts and share them online. Blogs can exist on their own webpages or on platforms where

many other users share their blogs with one another (Jacobs 2004:1). The latter applied in this study. Blogs have come a long way since their inception on the World Wide Web where they evolved from instant messaging and email to personal diary accounts and in recent times have slowly started to make their way into academia (Coleman 2009:1).

Arianne Rourke and Kathryn Coleman (2009:1) explored the possibility of the blog being used as a tool in postgraduate studies and found that blogging comes quite naturally to millennials who are easily able to adapt to the modernisation of education in terms of the internet and technology. However, this concept is not applicable to all South Africans as only 55% of the country's estimated population of 55.21 million has access and appropriate devices to connect to the internet and uses it regularly (Digital Statistics in South Africa 2017:5).

Rourke and Coleman suggest that blogging enhances tertiary students' learning experiences in that it offers interdisciplinary sites where students' research converges as they are able to share their data/ research with one another (Rourke and Coleman 2009:2). Blogs are a self-directed medium where students are able to write how they want about what they want. The act of sharing promotes learning and creates a stimulating environment for students as "social spaces = learning spaces" (Rourke and Coleman 2009:2).

However, blogging is not fully accepted in academia. Jacobs and Williams (2004:3) note that it is regarded with scepticism as posting online comes with elements of power, which could compromise ethics. Blogging is a form of self-publishing where any individual from any discipline and level of education can publish information. This can have negative implications for the audience as the posts are not peer-reviewed or fact-checked and could thus disseminate misinformation (Jacobs and Williams 2004:3). Taking this into consideration, in creating my blog, I disclosed that the information presented was subjective as it was a reflective journal based on my own creative practice as a student. I also adhered to academic writing principles and ensured that all information, sources and claims were appropriately referenced.

After conducting research on blogging platforms, I identified one that suited the type of environment that I wanted my reflexive and reflective journal to exist within. This environment needed to be creative and collaborative and provide a site for participation with likeminded individuals. The platform Behance is owned by Adobe, the company that created Photoshop – software that I used to create most of my artwork for this study. Behance's mission statements states "Behance, part of the Adobe family, is the leading online platform to showcase & discover creative work" (Sloan 2019 para. 1 line 1). Both my artwork and reflective and reflexive journal were created using Adobe software.

My Behance account was created in March 2018. The posts would be published online for public consumption; therefore, the language register used needed to be standard. Blog posts were written informally in a spoken language register as this was the most effective and efficient way to textually explore my ideas as I came up with them, making the writing more organic and personal. This constituted the reflexive aspect of the writing practice.

Most importantly, I critically reflected on each artwork that I created and wrote about the successful and unsuccessful elements of the works, and how I could improve them. I also wrote short accounts of critique sessions and meetings with my supervisors and fellow master's students throughout the three-year period. This enabled me to keep track of the feedback I received from these sessions that helped me to improve both practically and theoretically. They also were valuable tools in that they documented the process as and when it happened.

Blogging became an integral part of the study, as it played a central role in creating my work. I found it an emancipating space where I could explore and express my feminist thoughts and ideas through writing. Keeping the digital journal assisted me in multiple ways, including improving my information retrieval skills. The journal was of great assistance in pulling information and references that I already had on my blog and using them when writing this dissertation.

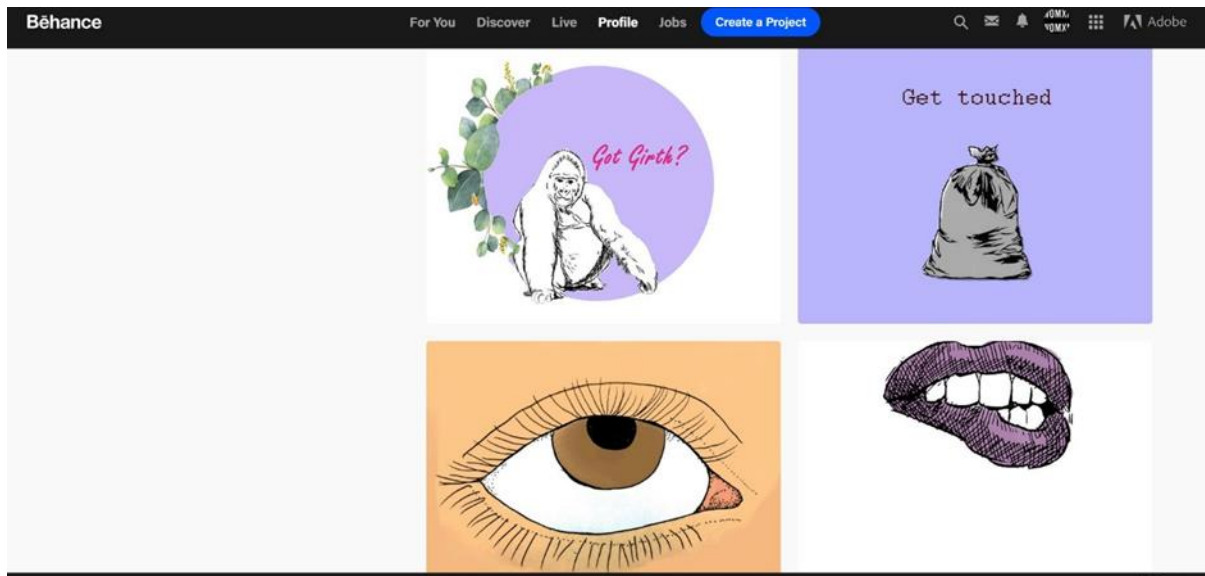


Figure 15. First Version of Blog. 2018. S, Kieswetter (Screen Grab)

As can be seen in Figure 15, in the early stages of creating the blog, I did not think critically about its overall aesthetic. The first posts reveal a learning process on how to navigate the platform. Each post required a cover page that would be shown on the blog's landing page when one entered the site. For these cover pages, images of the preliminary artworks were used to illustrate the posts. As a result, the appearance of the site lacked consistency and was too colourful and I felt that it presented itself with an illustrative aesthetic. It was for these reasons that I gave the blog its first transformation.

In recreating this blog, I was informed by a colleague (a master's graphics and design student) that using a consistent colour scheme makes the page more appealing to the user. I decided to use a grey font as this puts less strain on viewers' eyes and they can therefore read for a longer period of time. The use of grey was interesting conceptually in terms of colour psychology (2019:1) the colour grey is often thought to be neutral, formal, impartial and in-between; this colour resonated with my ideas/concepts.

A tricolour theme of grey, pink and white was used to create my preliminary artworks. The cover pages for each post were inspired by the Body Anxiety exhibitions webpage, used a minimalist setup and only incorporated the title of the post, with a plain solid coloured background (Figure 16). These cover pages were created using Photoshop and mimicked the style of art I was making. The font used throughout the study is called 'bebas'; it was also used to create some of my textual artworks. The colour palette (pink, grey and white) was carefully chosen as these colours are stereotypically associated with being female/feminine (Frassanito and Pettorin 2008:881) I wanted to use them as a form of subversion, going against unequal gender power dynamics to subvert the masculine online space

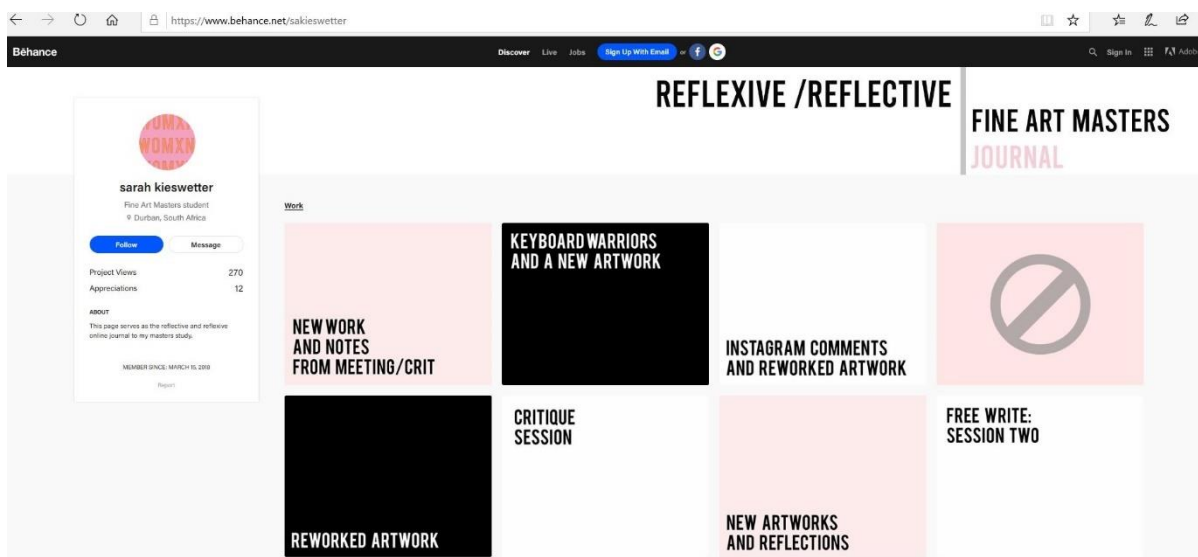


Figure 16. Second Version of Blog. 2018. Kieswetter, S. (Screen Grab)

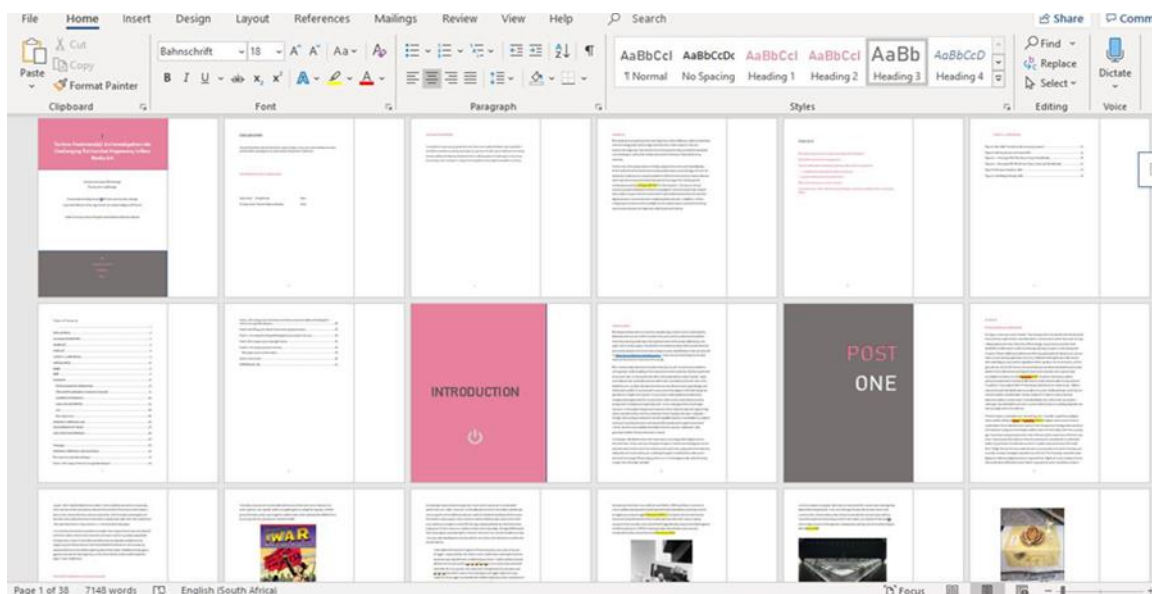


Figure 17. First Draft of Dissertation. 2018. Kieswetter, S. (Screen Grab)

This pastel theme was carried over to all aspects of this study and was used when designing the first drafts of this dissertation (Figure 17). It was not until August 2019 that my ideas about the aesthetic changed again. My artwork had gone through a major transformation where I stopped making so-called feminine looking works and the blog and my dissertation's aesthetic were no longer adequate for the new style of artwork. Rather than creating a subversion of the stereotypes associated with these colours, the works and the blog's aesthetic entrenched them. The new artworks were bold and created with a colour pallet inspired by Barbara Kruger's work, which references a common colour palette that is adopted in advertisements as it is bold and enticing to the viewer (Kruger's work and background is explained in detail in post 7). Red, black, grey and white were used and this was carried over throughout the blog and the dissertation (Figure 18).

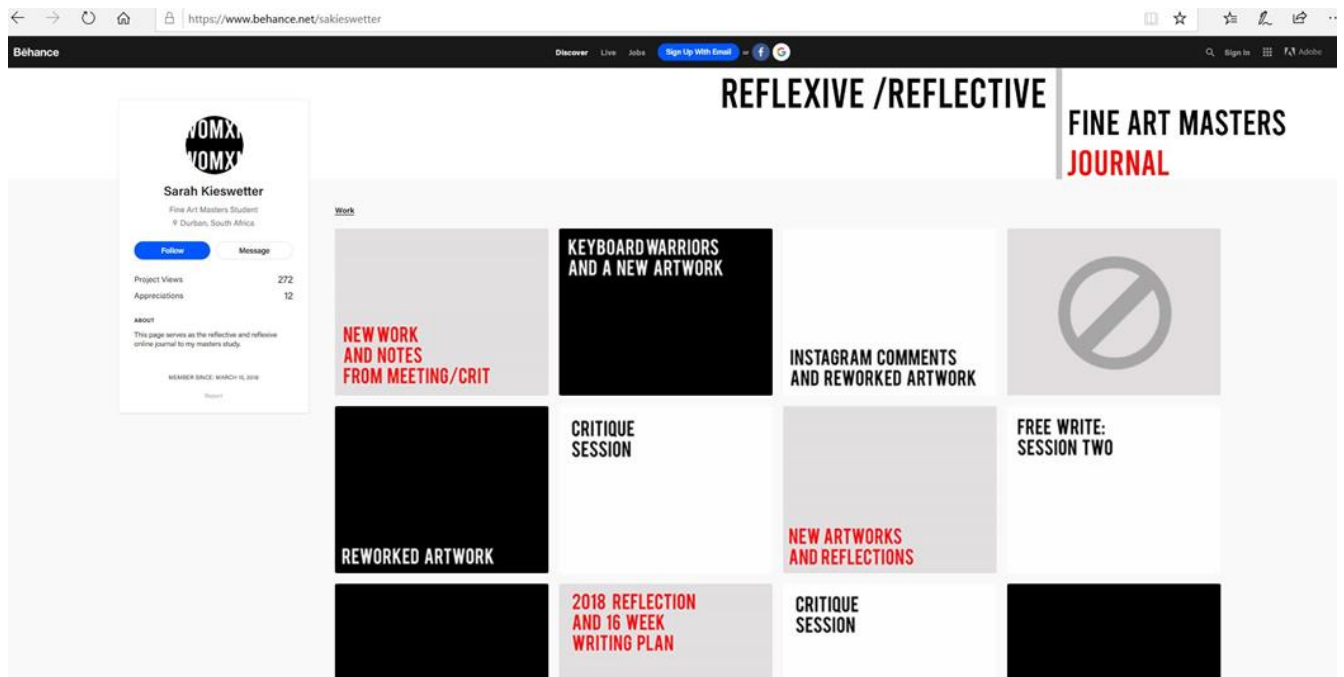


Figure 18 Final Version of Blog. 2019. Kieswetter, S. (Screen Grab).

In reflecting on my experience with blogging, it appears that the process enabled further investigation in my research and improved my critical thinking, informational retrieval, design and reflective skills that consolidated the conceptual artworks. However, there was a need to explore other forms of contemporary social media to disseminate my works which in this case was Instagram.

Instagram is a social media application that was launched in October 2010. It was created to be used on a smartphone rather than a computer and is considered to be a form of micro-blogging as it is an image/ video sharing application (Moreau 2019) and is one of my favourite forms of social media. What makes Instagram different from Behance and traditional blogging is that it is not textual, but visual. It is possible to post artworks and photos onto one's profile and let them speak for themselves, which differs from a traditional blog where one writes about each artwork. Given that Instagram is more visual, it attracts a different community of individuals and is appealing to creatives. Budge (2013:5) states that "being visually minded and driven,

artists have adopted Instagram with enthusiasm and have become avid users of this social media application". The author adds that "the image is the primary interaction for users. Artists are drawn to Instagram for this very reason" (Budge 2013:5). It was this online interaction with the audience that I sought to secure for my art practice.

Although my blog did allow me to have some form of interaction with a broader audience, it was on Instagram that I received the most feedback. For my Instagram account I created a public profile under the handle of *@sk_the_artist*. I chose not to disclose my name. I was initially interested in the idea of working anonymously and therefore decided to keep it this way as I had already gained a small following. I posted all my artwork on my page and captioned each post with a title, date, medium and then hash tagged them with the feminist hashtags. A hashtag is a digital strategy for categorising content online where one puts # in front of keywords e.g. #newmedia. This strategy is unique to social media (Doctor 2012) and it is a powerful tool to help users follow and locate content around a topic/ theme or even to generate awareness. Using hashtags in my posts facilitated the linkages between my artwork and a feminist audience, resulting in more targeted feedback compared to my blog that mainly attracted invariable 'likes' and the occasional comment.

Instagram is a collaborative space that opens up opportunities for collaborative practice and thus to receive constructive feedback. In fine art it is common practice to have critique sessions with peers, whereby one presents one's practical work and receives constructive feedback on the artworks. Those that attend these crit sessions are usually academics and artists who are already formally immersed in the art world. This feedback is important and helped to drive my study and art practice forward, but could resonate with a wider audience as I wanted my techno-feminist artworks to create awareness. Budge (2013:6) states that social media can be used as a communicative tool as a part of studio practice that enables understanding of one's work at a global level, contributing to the artwork's development. These observations find relevance in my page's analytics. This data was collected from the inception of my artist's account in May 2017 and revealed that the artworks that I was posting on Instagram were seen by an international audience with a similar

demographic to myself. These statistics supported my assumption that artwork that is posted on social media reaches a larger audience than work that is exhibited in local galleries (Figure 19).

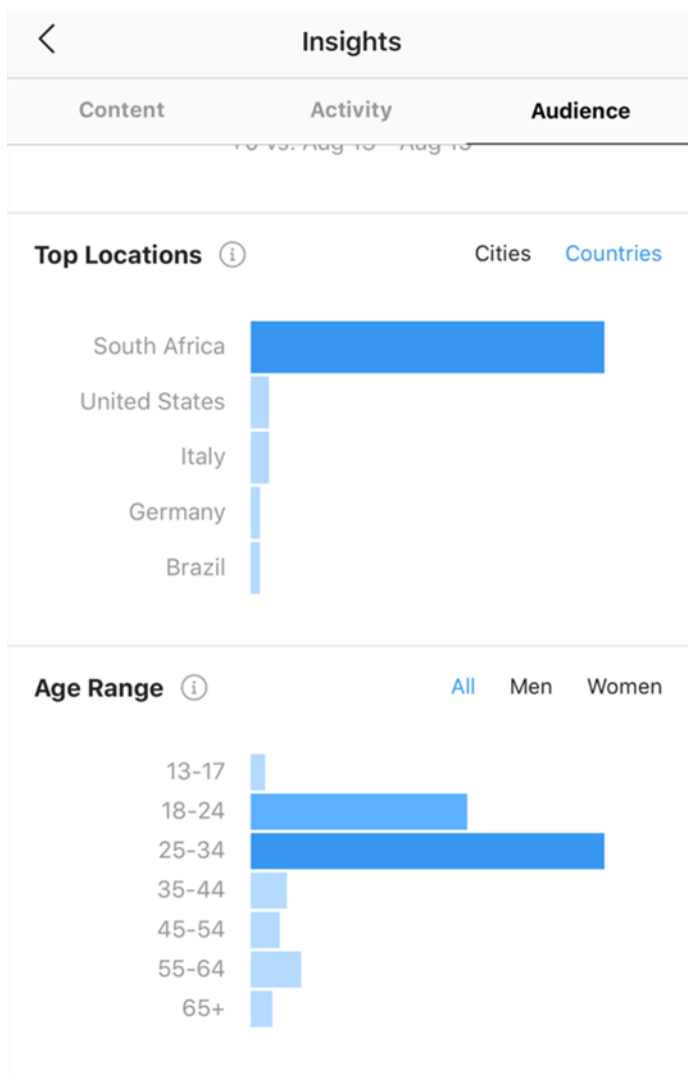


Figure 19. Instagram Analytics. 2019. Kieswetter, S. (Screen Grab)

Publishing my work online on Instagram, allowed me to move away from the confines of the gallery system and reach a larger audience. However, the statistics were limited as they did not stipulate the gender of the audience. Such information would have been helpful as it would have supported my claim that the internet is a male dominated space. Nonetheless, these interactions helped to develop my artworks, and the constructive feedback received on Instagram from my audience was at times similar to the feedback I received in a crit session from an artist colleague. This can be seen in one instance where a user commented on a video artwork that I posted (Figure 20). In this artwork I filmed my own hand pulling a 'middle finger' sign and then heavily edited it on Photoshop to get the desired effect. The artwork was filmed

on my iPhone in portrait format, creating some issues with its dimensions and compromising its composition (Figure 20), as there appeared to be too much extra space on either side of the video clip. This composition was picked up on by the anonymous user when she/he commented “I can’t decide if I like this photo because of the composition or place but it is really good” (Anon 2019).



Figure 20 .2019.Middle Finger. Kieswetter.S (Screen Grab)

This user commented on this post within an hour of it being up on Instagram. I took this feedback into consideration and reworked and improved the artwork (Figure 21) by correcting its composition to fit the page and using a video cropper app downloaded from the iPhone app store. The original version of this artwork was removed off the account and replaced with the improved version.



Figure 21. Reworked Middle Finger. 2018. Kieswetter, S. (Digital Media)

Having an Instagram account enabled my artwork to transition from the virtual studio space of my laptop to a virtual gallery space online, one that I was able to curate and control and move against the parameters of the traditional real-world gallery system. The informal gallery that Instagram provided also impacted my art practice as it helped me to see how my works appeared as a collective which in turn, helped me to curate the final exhibition.

Looking back, I can see that using a blog and an Instagram account positively impacted and enriched both my study and my artist practice. These platforms provide stimulating and motivating environments for creation, creative practise and

reflection. They enabled the creation of a virtual studio and gallery space that facilitated a connection with an audience that went beyond the academic environment. My experience suggests that a blog and an Instagram page are effective communicative tools for creating and disseminating techno-feminist new media artworks.

KS

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**PRELIMINARY
ART: THE START
OF MY ART
MAKING
PROCESS**

POST SIX: PRELIMINARY ART: THE START OF MY ART MAKING PROCESS

CREATED ON 3 SEPTEMBER 2019

This post presents a critical reflection on the artworks created. The conceptual ideas that underpinned my art practice are unpacked in light of how these were translated into my preliminary artworks. The focus is on the technical aspects of the preliminary artworks and the decisions leading to the use of specific digital photo-editing software like Photoshop to create my artworks.

In creating my digital art, certain factors needed to be taken into consideration. First, the artwork needed to be cost-effective and make use of the equipment that I already owned. Secondly, I needed to be realistic and create digital artwork using techniques and mediums that can be self-taught, and finally, the software needed to be carefully chosen and relevant to a techno-feminism(s) approach.

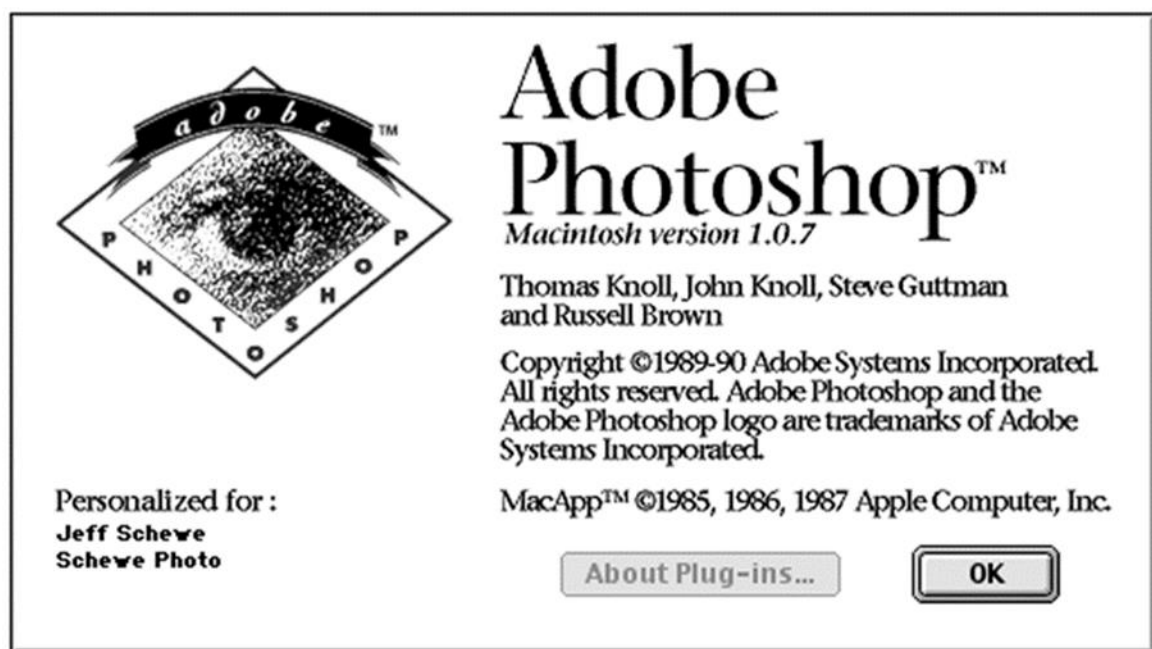


Figure 22. 2019. Adobe Photoshop. Adobe. (Online Image)

Adobe Photoshop was used to create my artworks. This predominantly photo editing and manipulation software was originally created in 1989 by Thomas Knoll and John

Knoll (Figure 22). Adobe Photoshop is mainly used by professional photographers and creatives in the advertising and media industry (Allen 2019). Photoshop was interesting for this study because of the controversial nature of the programme. Since its inception, it has been used to digitally retouch and manipulate photos, which can be considered problematic as it is often used to create a 'perfect' image beyond the photographer's original depiction of reality. In the context of the human body, this is problematic in that it reinforces stereotypes about beauty and femininity. Such extreme photo editing occurs across all fields and industries from everyday products to the fashion and beauty industries. Although both men and womxn's bodies are victims of such editing, I focused on womxn, as their bodies are edited and retouched in order to meet ideal beauty standards set by the patriarchal society in which we live and that many feminists contest (Crabapple 2014 para. 5 line 1- 5). Denunciation of this practice has led to an 'anti-Photoshop' or 'No Photoshop' pledge to not allow images of womxn to be photoshopped and to enable them to reclaim ownership of their bodies and challenge patriarchal ideals (Crabapple 2014 para. 5 line 1- 5).

While this movement seems to have a positive impact, it could be argued that rather than boycotting the software, it could be reclaimed by using a similar technique inspired by the The Guerrilla Girls, which is to subvert the object that oppresses them to promote change. Photoshop can be used as a tool to challenge patriarchal hegemony and raise awareness of feminist issues through one's art practice. In order to learn Photoshop, I watched tutorials on a YouTube channel called 'PHLEARN' that I found myself going back to throughout the three-year period of my study (PHLEARN 2019). Its short, easy to digest videos, helped me to gain the skills I needed to create artwork relatively fast.

The first artwork I created was a GIF – Graphics interchangeable format – a format directly linked to social media. Memes and GIFs are popular modes of visual communication that are often humorous and use iconic imagery from pop culture with a short text to convey messages. These new forms of cultural online artefacts are often created anonymously and are shared, liked and spread online at a fast pace (Borzsei 2013:1-3). Feminist artists Chan, Schrager and The Guerrilla Girls have all

experimented with them in their art practice. It became apparent that GIFs and Memes would be the ideal way to create my techno-feminist artworks.

Basic stop-frame animation, a Photoshop video editing feature, was used to create a GIF. The first artwork created using the stop-frame animation was experimental and needed to be set in a feminist context. To achieve this, I drew on my lived experience of often being told to “smile more” and that a womxn looks better with a smile on her face – a concept that literally makes my eyes roll. With this in mind, the artwork was a simple stop-frame illustration of a rolling eye with a caption underneath.

I digitized my work by drawing line-drawings by hand and scanning using Photoshop before colouring the image (Figures 23-24). The stop-frame animation required multiple frames that captured the eye-rolling at various stages. To achieve this, I drew various images of the eye rolling movement and scanned and photoshopped them.

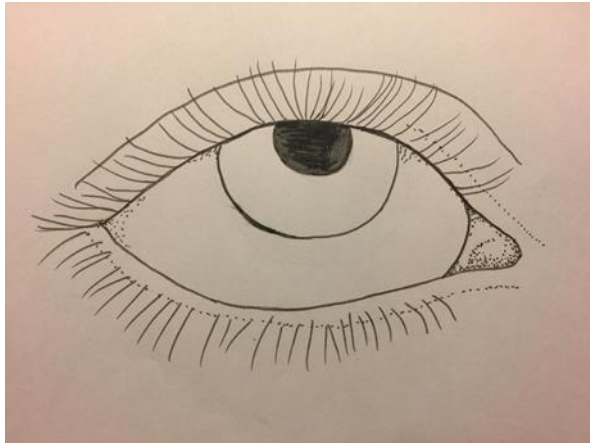


Figure 24. 2017. Line drawing. Kieswetter, S. (Process Drawing)

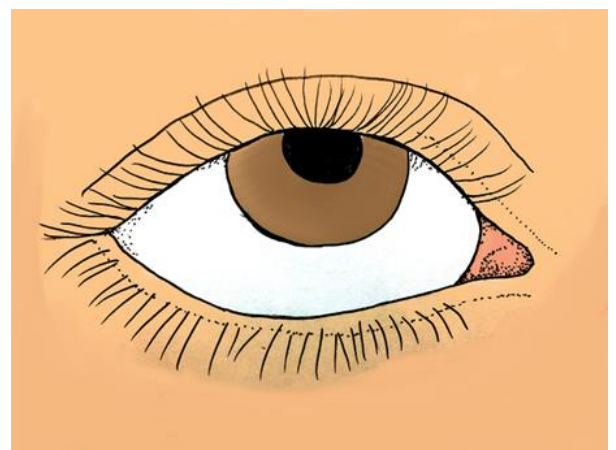


Figure 23. 2017. Photoshopped Line drawing. Kieswetter, S. (process Image)

Once scanned, digitized and coloured, the drawings were saved as a JPG. A new Photoshop document was opened, and the images were imported into the video

editing feature. The frames were collated (Figure 25), the resulting footage looped into an MP4 format and the first GIF was made.



Figure 25. 2017. Frames of eye roll. Kieswetter, S. (Process Images)

The process of learning to create this artwork was important as it was the starting point of my art-making development for my practical work for this study and showed me that I could create work digitally on my own in Photoshop.

I followed the same process for the rest of my preliminary artworks. Using this technique, my artworks took on an illustrative style and the flat colours further emphasised this look. This is evident in some of my preliminary artworks on pages 58-60. Moving away from line drawing by hand, I started to create some of my artworks digitally from the start on Photoshop. This can be seen in Figure 30 where I created some text centred artworks. Images and graphics available through the creative commons were also used to create memes. Building on already existing images is also in line with a technical concept called the 'amateur aesthetic', a term coined by artist Jennifer Chan (Kretowicz 2014). This can be seen in Figure 26 where a vintage photograph of two female boxers was digitally manipulated and added to the artwork, as well as in Figure 27 where I took the pointed finger hand out of a classical painting and reused/ recreated it to make a GIF.



Figure 27. 2017. PHD syndrome. Kieswetter, S. (Still of GIF)



Figure 26. 2019. Pointing Fingers. Kieswetter, S. (Still of GIF)

The amateur aesthetic is a technique that describes how someone who is not necessarily a professional or is formally trained in a medium can still create work. It can be applied to memes /GIFs, as most of those who create them are members of the general public. However, this technique has also been used by artists who are not formally trained in an art medium (digital art) but who are none the less proficient. Artist Jennifer Chan who coined the term employs the amateur aesthetic as she pulls already existing imagery and ideas from the internet and reworks and manipulates

them on Microsoft programmes like PowerPoint, creating GIFs, memes and videos (Figure 28) as her final artworks (Kretowicz 2014).



Figure 28 2015. Untitled. Chan, J. (Net Art).

Chans' works can also be termed net art as they are created from her computer and are then published only on the internet/ cyberspace. I was inspired by the technical aspect of her work and could see similarities between her practice and mine in that I too was in the process of becoming a self-taught digital artist and the preliminary works that I created were created with a computer programme that is now accessible to anyone. My works were sometimes also created using borrowed images found online. Their illustrative look gives them an amateur feel and they are intended to be consumed and disseminated on online social media platforms.



Figure 29.2017. Womxn. Kieswetter, S. (Digital Art)



Figure 30. Get Touched. Kieswetter, S. (Digital Art)

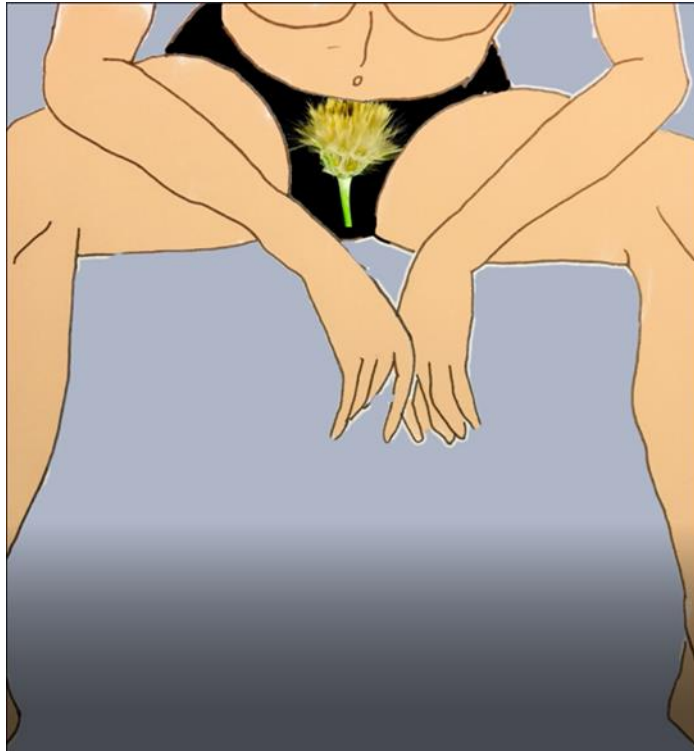


Figure 31. 2017. Blossoming. Kieswetter, S. (Still of GIF)



Figure 32. 2017. Trigger Warning. Kieswetter, S. (Still GIF)



Figure 33. 2017. Consumable. Kieswetter, S. (Digital Media)

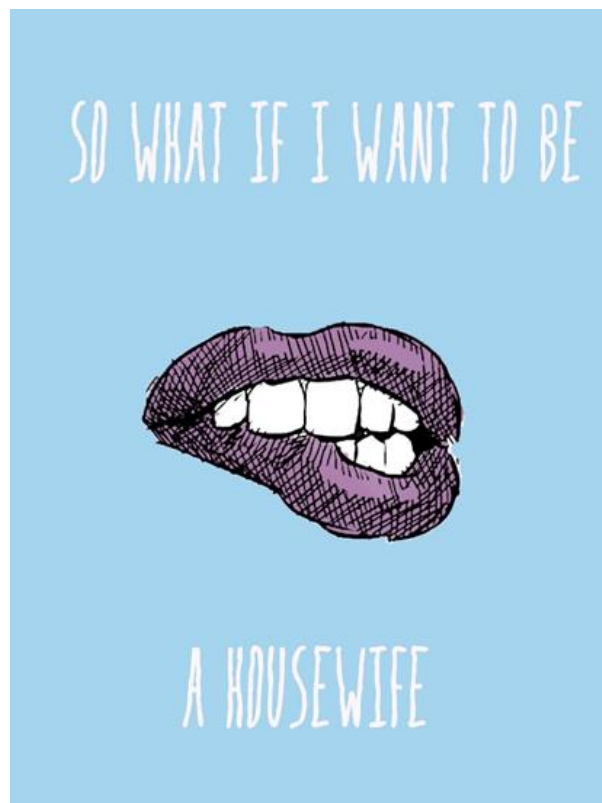


Figure 34. 2017. So What? Kieswetter, S. (Digital Media)

Reflecting on the aesthetics of my series of artworks, they were not the style of art that I wanted to create. The work looked too illustrative and candid and did not effectively communicate the concepts that each work expressed. I wanted the works to be more serious and bolder, conveying the emotions that I had experienced through my lived experiences that sparked this master's research. These works became preliminary drafts and would not be used in the final exhibition but were important steppingstones to realise the resultant works.

From this point in time, the evolution of my art practice seemed inevitable. The inspiration I drew from online feminist movements on social media that were gaining traction in 2017 was to be taken a step further. Figure 29 'Get Touched' is an example of an artwork that was created in relation to the #menaretrash movement, where womxn called out problematic patriarchal behaviour, and shared and recounted their stories on social media sites in order to create awareness and educate the public (Matebese 2017). The #menaretrash movement resonated with the techno-feminist themes of this study as I wanted my artwork to address similar issues with a similar goal in mind. While this theme would be carried through in my subsequent work, I also wanted to move away from the illustrative style in order to create works that incorporated more text and borrowed images.

Although the preliminary works were not selected to be a part of my final MA exhibition, they formed part of my research and reflective process. Creating these works was the starting point of my art practice and by reflecting on them critically I was able to move it forward towards the final artworks, which are discussed in the next post (post 7).

**THIS
IS
OUR**

**NEW
NEW
NEW
NEW
NEW**

**THE FINAL
ARTWORKS**

POST SEVEN: THE FINAL ARTWORKS

CREATED ON 1 OCTOBER 2019

This post provides a written reflective account of the decisions I made that led to the production of the final artworks. It also discusses the technical approaches I used to create my works and looks at how the established artists researched inspired and influenced my art-making process. Finally, I critically analyse some of the works that I created and discuss how I intended to showcase them for the exhibition.

Following the unsuccessful preliminary works, I moved on to create the final body of artwork. These were inspired by the artwork of Barbra Kruger. Kruger is a conceptual artist and collagist known for her artworks created by images overlaid with aggressive, bold captions and slogans that comment on power relations, control and other societal feminist issues (Guggenheim 2019). She is best known for her artworks' black, white and red aesthetic that was inspired by her previous graphic design/ advertising career. Her works are often printed in a large scale format that covers the walls and ceilings of entire spaces that "engulf and even assault the viewer" (Guggenheim 2019). Kruger also creates works that are disseminated in unique ways such as printing on umbrellas, cups, bags, and postcards and even having exhibitions in shopping malls (Figure 35) in order to comment on the blurred definitions of fine art. Her artworks are feminist and the language often uses pronouns such as "you", "your", "they" and "we" as a conceptual technique to addresses the power and hegemony that one individual holds over another (Art 21 2019).

These visual techniques and conceptual elements can be seen in Figures 34 and 35. I was inspired by the way in which Kruger's works appear and by the emphasis that she places on the textual elements and language used in her works which greatly influenced my artworks.



Figure 35. 1945. What You See is What You Get. Kruger, B. (Digital Art)



Figure 36. 2012. Belief + Doubt. Kruger, B. (Mixed Media)

The first works that I created for my final body of works were made up of black and white text that were inspired by The Guerrilla Girls, Kruger, and the social media #metoo movement. This hashtag was originally created by Tarana Burke in 2007 but gained momentum during the allegations made against Harvey Weinstein (Garcia 2017), the infamous Hollywood producer accused of sexual misconduct (harassment) who was subsequently convicted and sentenced to 23 years in prison (Ransom 2020). Many survivors of his abuse exposed him online. This series of denunciations led to a global movement of womxn using social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to share and expose their experiences of sexual harassment using the hashtag '#metoo'. I wanted to focus on online sexual harassment by making a series of posters that comment on how online spaces are gendered and how womxn are treated online. The series of artworks are based on my own experiences as a female user.

The three posters I created took the form of multiple-choice questions that only have one answer. The work was influenced by one created by The Guerrilla Girls in the 1990s (Figure 37). Similar to Kruger's work, The Guerrilla Girls appropriated the persuasive visual language used in advertising, by using bold black and white block text in the form of a poster.

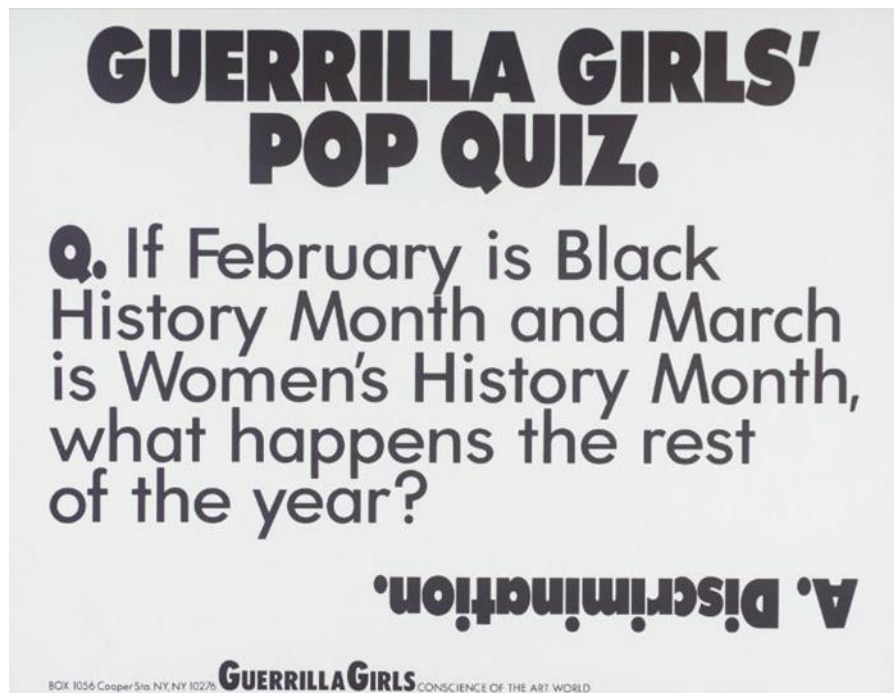


Figure 37. 1990. Pop Quiz. The Guerrilla Girls. (Printed Poster)

According to the group, this advertisement-inspired style is successful as it is able to “convey their messages in a quick and accessible manner” (Tate 2019). The aim of ‘The Pop Quiz’ was to create awareness that artists who are womxn of colour only seem to get solo exhibitions and be represented by galleries during womxn’s history month and black history month (Tate 2019). I created three posters (Figure 38) in a similar way, using persuasive visual language in the form of multiple-choice questions that comment on and create awareness of social media and the way womxn are treated online.

Q&A

**Q: WHAT DO YOU DO IF SOMEONE
SAYS #METOO?**

A: BELIEVE THEM

B: TOTALLY BELIEVE THEM

C: JUST BELIEVE THEM

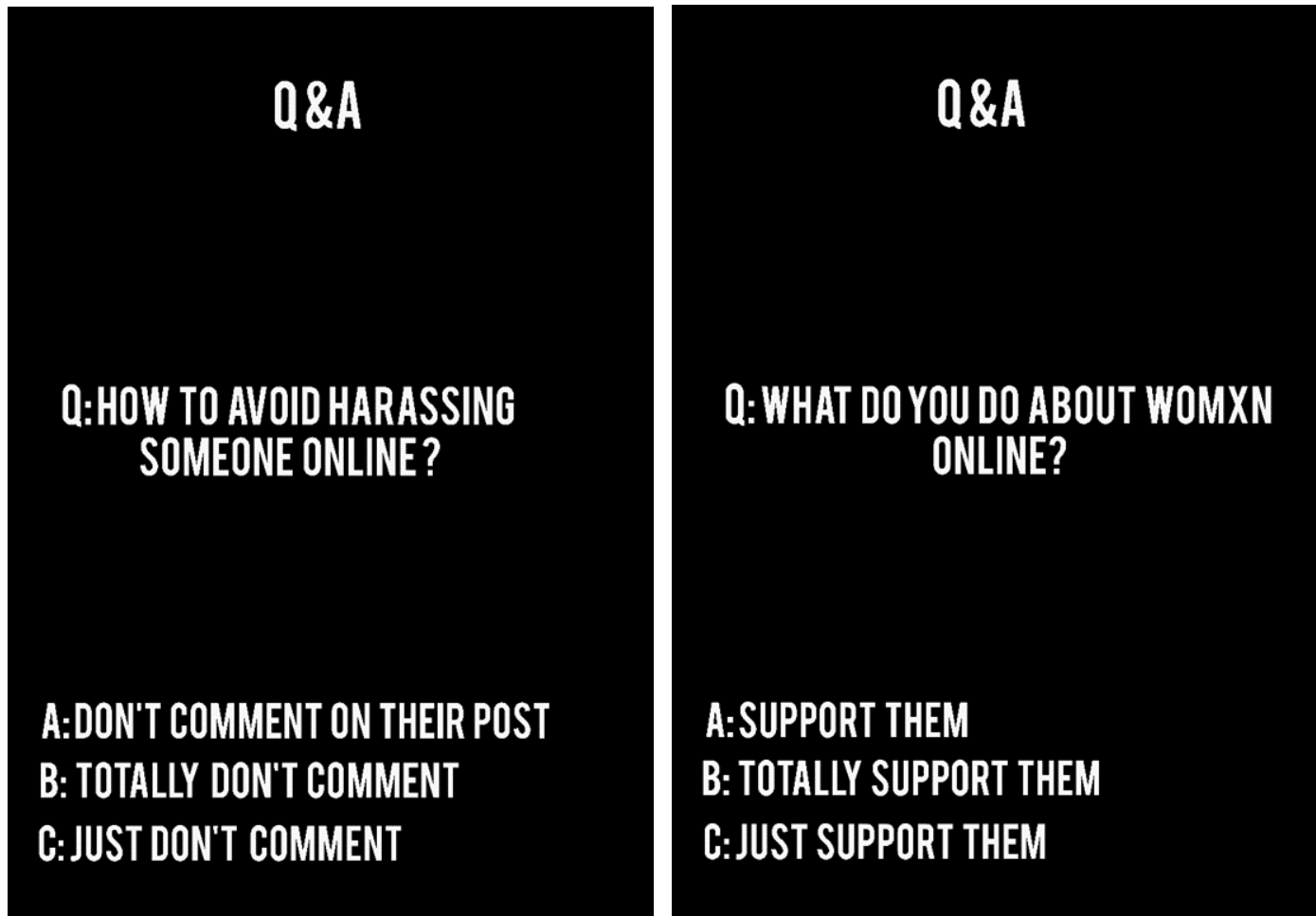


Figure 38. 2019. Q&A Series. Kieswetter, S. (Poster)

During a critique session (13 February 2020) the size in which these posters would be printed was discussed and we came to the conclusion that a large format would be beneficial. They were printed on A0 size paper (the size of a movie poster) and each was placed on a wall of its own. Presenting artworks on a large scale has the potential to be intimidating to the viewer and dominate a space and my intention was to unsettle the viewer and move them out of their comfort zone, an approach inspired by the way Barbara Kruger exhibits her artworks. Creating work on this scale references the power relations commented on by the work. In these works, I posed three questions that all reference online culture and how womxn are treated online. Three answers were offered for each question; however, these were the same answer that was merely written in three different ways. This wording positioned the artworks to conceptually interrogate and critique the gendered space of the internet

by creating a new power dynamic through removing one's choice and thereby created awareness of womxn's voices online.

The next artwork was a diptych in the form of two GIFs (video) based on existing footage of a man shaking his head and a womxn nodding hers that was re-edited. The original videos were taken from a website called 'Giphy' that was created in 2013 by Jace Cooke and Alex Chung. Giphy is an online search engine and database where users are able to create, share and search for online looping videos or GIF files (Giphy 2019). Most of these files are made to be shared and re-edited by members of the public and are not copyrighted.

For this artwork, I wanted to create a pair of videos that would be placed on opposite sides of the room facing each other as if the figures in the videos are in a conversation. I wanted the artwork to be of a man and a womxn shaking/ nodding their heads at each other, in order for the works to reference the disagreement and power dynamic between genders. The videos adopted a colour palette of black, white and red. The original videos (Figure 39-40) were in full colour, with the female figure being a clip from a popular TV programme, The Cosby Show (Bill Cosby also fell from grace and was convicted of sexual assault), while the clip of the male figure resembled that of stock videography, with a bold brightly coloured kitsch background. However, the work erred on the side of playfulness while I was seeking a more serious tone.



Figure 39. 2019. Head Shake Man. Anon (Still of GIF)



Figure 40 .n.d. Female Nod. Anon. (Still GIF)

These clips were edited and manipulated on Photoshop, zoomed in and cropped into a new composition where only the eyes and nose were shown. The clips were then edited with the raw camera filter option in Photoshop adjusting the exposure, saturation, clarity, contrast, shadows, highlights, vibrancy, whites, blacks, temperature, and tint until I obtained the desired effect (Figure 41). Although these artworks were conceived of as a pair, each had its own title with reference to the work's concepts. The work with the male figure was entitled 'A Shaking Man' and the female 'The Nodding Womxn'.



Figure 41. 2019. A Shaking Man. Kieswetter, S. (Still of GIF)



Figure 42. 2019. The Nodding Womxn. Kieswetter, S. (Still of GIF)

The next two artworks created for this research followed on from the previous ones as they both commented on patriarchal hegemony and womxn in the online space. However, they were created using a different approach as I mainly using my cell phone and then edited them later in Photoshop on my laptop. These works marked a move away from using borrowed images towards using original imagery created by myself.

The artwork 'Power Switch' is a cell phone video of my hand turning off an illuminated switch (Figure 43). This artwork was created more organically than the others as it was created intuitively. However, it ended up being used as a final artwork and is the work that I most enjoyed making. The reason was the process of making the work without any preliminary planning – which I think can be a more creative and organic way of producing art. In the artwork, the viewer can hear the sound of me clicking off the switch. Sound was not included in any of my other works or any artwork that I had ever made before. A sound element strengthened the work as it added an additional element for the viewer to take in. It also introduced me to a new way of making future work.

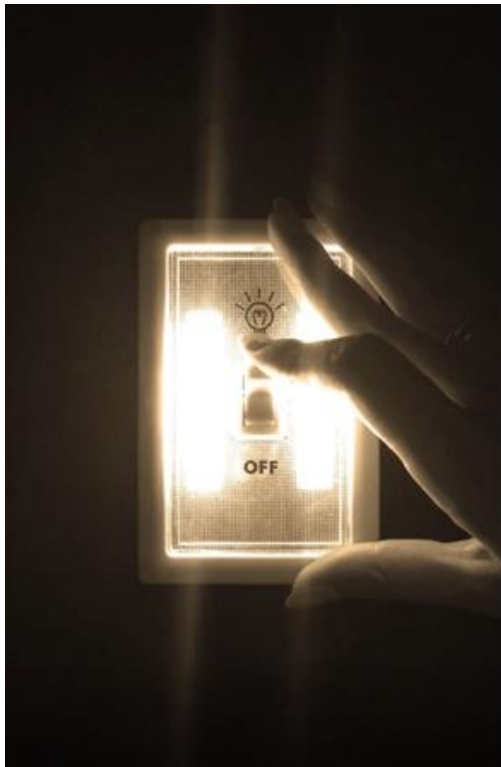


Figure 43. 2019. Power Switch. Kieswetter, S. (Stills of GIF)

The footage of this video was edited in Photoshop where the colours were adjusted using a sepia filter and the clip was placed on a loop so that it would be turned into a GIF. This was the one work that did not follow the black, white and red theme that I had chosen yet when I placed it amongst the other works, I had created for my MA series, it did fit in. I felt that this artwork and the looping action of turning the switch off conceptually represented the cycle of power in quite a direct way. By using my own hand with my manicured nails and rings on my fingers, I represented my lived experience of being a female artist trying to challenge the patriarchal hegemonic systems at play in the art world by figuratively turning its power off. My work was more personal and less general from this point on, as the political became closely intertwined with my own experience.

This can be seen in one of the last series of eight artworks that I made as part of this research. These artworks' compositions were carefully planned, discussed and adapted over time, which was a shift from my previously more spontaneous work. For this body of works I wanted to use a function on Instagram where one is able to share an image or a written text message as one's status or 'stories' for only 24 hours before they are deleted. The original aim was to create textual works for my Instagram stories for the artworks to be ephemeral (which complemented the 24h timeline). However, creating works in this way posed some technical challenges, mainly that I would only be able to show the works during my exhibition for a limited amount of time. I therefore decided to do away with the 24-hour stories and to just use its format in order to reference social media. The first edition of the works on Instagram stories was thus created, inspired by Barbara Kruger's artwork and adopting her signature red and white block Helvetica text.

I presented this series of artwork at a crit session (13 February 2020) where it was suggested that I should consider reworking the artworks as the pre-set automatically emphasised random words, taking away the conceptual value of the works. The Instagram stories format was copied in Photoshop and the wording was sized differently and edited. Photoshop also allowed me to adjust the pixel sizes for the works to be digitally printed as A1 posters.

While this artwork's format was planned, I wanted the content to be created organically. Creating digital techno-feminist art in this manner is in my view more effective, especially since this work draws on my lived experience. These works were created over a two-week period when I simply wrote down witty bold statements that documented my thoughts and opinions on being a female artist online. In total I made more than 20 works and decided to only use the most successful ones which ended up being the eight works that made up the series which I entitled '*Stories*'. This title was chosen for two reasons, the first being that the plural 'stories' is directly linked to Instagram and social media and the second being more conceptual, to highlight the ambiguity of the word as it refers to fact, fiction and non-fiction and the action of

passing on a message. I felt that this ambiguity could be compared to the blurred definitions of art that this study critiques.







Figure 44. 2019. Stories Series. Kieswetter, S. (Poster)

The last two posts presented and discussed the practical component of the study which were the artworks that I created. Through this discussion, an account took shape of the evolution of my art practice over the three-year period of this masters. This was marked by independently learning to create digital art using Photoshop, my laptop as my studio, my cell phone, the internet, and social media as a public space to create and exhibit. The works presented in these posts are only a few of the artworks from the body of work that I created and that I used as examples to showcase, discuss and reflect on my creative process.

It is interesting how my preliminary artworks gradually changed from digitalised hand-drawn illustrative art, to works with generalised concepts, into final artworks. Some of my works were created by borrowing from already existing images and videos online. Others were originally created and filmed by myself. This body of

artwork can be placed in the category of techno-feminism(s) as its conceptual underpinning addressed themes of hegemony, patriarchy, female lived experience, power, and gendered online spaces. The choice to disseminate my work via Instagram, Behance and then a physical exhibition formed a mechanism for the works and their feminist agenda to be consumed by a wider audience both online and physically.

While my artworks' concepts speak to one another, I used many different techniques to create them. I was inspired by the works of feminist artists who came before me, mainly Barbra Kruger and The Guerrilla Girls, who adopted the persuasive and impactful techniques used in the advertising industry. The work of Jennifer Chan was also an important reference, as she embraces the amateur aesthetic and the self-reflective learning of new mediums as an academic and artistic approach. I adopted many of these techniques and incorporated them into my own art which eventually led to me finding my own aesthetic and way of making digital, techno-feminist art that speaks of my experience.

THE
SOLUTION
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CONCLUSION

POST EIGHT: THE CONCLUSION

CREATED ON 29 JANUARY 2020

This master's study was a practice-based qualitative enquiry that was conducted over a three-year period and was made up of a practical body of artwork, a blog (reflective and reflexive journal), an Instagram account and a written dissertation. Writing reflectively about the artwork created and research undertaken became a cardinal aspect of this study as I was able to gain deeper understanding of techno-feminism(s). More than just a practical component of my study, my blog on Behance became an emergent learning site where theory and practice merged. This dissertation and my art practice were built by drawing information from my blog, and I thus chose to echo the blog format within this written component with reference to the layout and design. Writing this dissertation using an alternative page layout and design emphasises the possibilities offered by creative academic writing. While the focus of my research is on writing my blog reflectively and reflexively and under the practice-based research paradigm, possibilities could lend themselves for further research using autoethnography and self-study.

In post one, I introduced the main research topic and began to unpack the ideas that led me to situate my study within the field of new media and techno-feminism(s). I noted that this study was personal as it was an exploration to seek out my identity as a South African feminist artist. I reflected back to my past studies and identified how they led to the research undertaken in this master's study. I also noted that I sought to break free from traditional mediums and how I came to realise that the idea of male vs female mediums/ techniques is problematic and contradictory, as one can unconsciously create work that is stereotyped. A more neutral art medium became imperative.

As a digital native, I embarked on a journey of creating digital art, a medium that I had never used before. After starting the process of self-learning computer programmes like Photoshop to make my artefacts, I soon discovered that my whole art practice had transitioned to become digital. My laptop became my art studio, my blog – my

reflective and reflexive journal and Instagram became my virtual self-governed exhibition space. After becoming immersed in the new digital environment, I found myself starting to critique the visual art realm as I had known it before, using a feminist lens. I discovered that although I had used technology as a means of subversion and to move away from male-dominated disciplines, they were also affected by it. I concluded that it is perhaps not the medium that is problematic, but rather the way in which societal problems that exist in the real world are transferred into the art world and create a biased /gendered environment.

With the above in mind, I conducted research on feminism(s) in order to establish what facet of feminism(s) I mostly identify with. As I researched the four waves of feminism, it became apparent that fourth-wave feminism was the most appealing as it is primarily influenced by social media and technology. The fourth wave was coined by Judy Wajcman (2004) who also is the pioneer of the techno-feminist movement. Wajcman's theories critique the claim that the internet and technology are inherently gendered spaces (male-dominated). However, I observed that this field of feminism (techno-feminism) is not applied to the art world, in particular new media art, and felt that it could be. With the new notion that the medium does not define the gender and with the belief that social problems are transferred into the art world, I started to research 'patriarchal hegemony' based on Gramsci's theories.

Through my research, I found that patriarchal hegemony occurs in a cycle that needs, to be actively challenged for disruption to occur, as proposed by Stuart Hall (1977: 333), this disruption can be achieved through art. I went on to critically analyse the works of other artists (Barbara Kruger, The Guerrilla Girls, and Jennifer Chan) who use their art practice and artworks as means to challenge and create awareness of patriarchy. My art practice became the investigative/explorative tool to analyse and critique patriarchal hegemony in the visual art world.

My art practice followed an emergent design and went through a series of evolutions over the course of three years which is common in practice-based research. The preliminary works I created were illustrative with feminist concepts that seemed to

be generalised. These artworks slowly changed to become a body of final artwork that is bolder and more refined. The final artworks echoed and borrowed elements from the artists I researched, which helped me to develop my own technique to create a series of digitally created/ inspired artwork based on my lived experience as a womxn. Social media became the primary diffusion platform because it offered an opportunity for my work to be disseminated and shared beyond academia. On reflection, my work stresses the fact that offline and online worlds are merged, and that societal issues like patriarchal hegemony, therefore, exist in both. This notion can be expanded in relation to my art practice, where my physical lived experiences, with the physical making of art, transcended into the digital/ cyber realm.

Given that we live in a technological age traditional physical forms of activism have evolved to be digital. This suits the technological needs and is relevant to the digital native (my) generation. However, online activism has been described as keyboard warriors, slacktivism, and armchair activism. These critics claim that online activism is not sufficient as it does not lead to real change (Foster et al. 2019:1), a claim I argued against through my work.

The transition from the physical to the online world has made activism accessible to anyone with an internet connection and has led to heightened engagement in the discourse on feminist issues. On Instagram I only had about 95 followers which is not many however, it was never my goal to gain a large-scale audience but rather to prove a point that engagement can occur outside of the university environment.

In my view, it is worth pursuing. Creating work digitally and disseminating it online (Instagram & Behance) was a successful mechanism for me to challenge and create awareness of the gender-related issues that persist in the art world. Through my practice, I was able to connect and communicate with an audience that went beyond my university circle , On Instagram and Behance I received comments on the artworks that I shared online, and I used this feedback to improve my artworks. The informatics and statistics that these sites provided showed that my work was being

viewed by an international audience. Both my Instagram page and blog will remain online, where I will continue on posting new artwork

Through this study, a whole new way of making art came into being as well as a new environment in which learning and creating could take place. This shift to an online environment enriched my art practice and further developed my skills as an artist. Finally, this study also provided me with new insights into techno-feminisms(s) and art activism and going forward I anticipate further exploring and investigating digital modes of creation and alternative environments for artmaking.

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