MAKINGS, 2022
Volume 3 Issue 1
ISSN 2752-3861 (Online)
makingsjournal.com

Makings
A Journal Researching the Creative Industries

It's Us!: Embracing Disruption through Feminist Approaches to Video Editing

Sophie Swoffer[1]
Email: s.swoffer@shu.ac.uk

Abstract

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, my creative process as a performance art practitioner has developed into one that joyously embraces disruption and 'glitching'. My final PhD performance piece *It's Us!* (2020) took the form of an online video work, which contrasts somewhat with my past live performances. Whilst the decision for this work to take place online was an inevitable one, this experience provided an opportunity to acquire new logic through explicitly adopting a feminist, ironic approach to video editing that celebrated and embraced the messiness of femininity through an engagement with 'glitching'.

Goriunova and Shulgin suggest that a glitch in software "is a mess that is a moment", and "a possibility to glance at software's inner structure" (cited in Sundén, 2008, p. 27). Through having to quickly adapt and develop my skills in video editing technology, I explored through *It's Us!* how I could use the 'messy' edit to expose the construction of my specifically constructed feminine personae whilst making explicit the construction of gender through digital practices. Jenny Sundén argues that gender, femininity in particular, is something that is "fundamentally technological, and hence broken" (2016, p. 23). In other words, Sundén suggests that femininity is a construction and thus likens gender to digital technology in that it is ultimately destined to have moments of glitching and failure. This paper explains how it is through these creative moments of glitching and failure that I cut out and crafted agency through slicing and reordering footage along with digitally manipulating that video work to represent my body as excessive in its feminine representation.

This paper reflects on the digital process and format of *It's Us!* and how the disruption of the pandemic has encouraged me to work in new productive digital ways. This writing also demonstrates how through this experience I have honed my digital creative practice to capture as much agency as a performer and creative maker as I had in a live transaction with audience members.

[1] Sophie Swoffer is a performance artist in the final year of her practice-based PhD at De Montfort University, which is funded by Midland4Cities/ AHRC. Her thesis is entitled *In Her Prime, or Past It?: Reconsidering the Gaze and Feminine Monstrosity in Feminist Performance Art and Film Studies*. Blurring the boundaries between the sexual and the grotesque, Sophie's work draws upon elements from both performance art and film studies, in order to explore alternative representations of agency-filled femininity. Through creating intermedial environments, Sophie interrogates these representations and their relationship to the male gaze. Sophie was the conference committee chair for the M4C-funded and DMU-supported 2019 practice-based conference, *Cracking the Established Order: Practice-Based Research in Academia*. She guest edited The International Journal of Creative Media Research's special edition of *Exploring Creative Methodologies* (June 2020) and has published a video essay of her practice the Body, Space, Technology Journal (Febuary 2021).

Introduction

The lasting impact of the pandemic has been globally significant for the creative and cultural industries. One of the ways it has greatly affected this kind of work has been the ongoing threat to live performance as the preferred format of creative dissemination. This article reflects on the different forms of disruption that I have experienced as a maker of live performance throughout COVID-19, but this writing also reflects on the forms of disruption that I create through my feminist performance art practice. These forms of disruption include new, creative ways of disrupting damaging, historical patriarchal narratives, along with providing ways of disrupting the ongoing effects of the objectifying male gaze onto the female body within feminist performance.

Alongside these investigations, this article details how the through line of disruption within my practice was magnified through the inevitable forms of disruption that I experienced and negotiated as a performance maker due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, this meant that I had to shift my practice from live performance to online digital creative work. Therefore, this article discusses ways of acquiring digitally created dynamic feminist agency which, I argue, can match and even supersede the agency provided by the live performing body. Indeed, throughout this writing, I offer up new productive ways of disturbing the masculinised objectifying gaze that can be taken up and adopted by feminist artists working with intermedial performance or within a fully video-based context. Moreover, I discuss and provide new feminist approaches to digital video practice and 'glitching' that can be employed by the artist wanting to make work on alternative and disruptive femininities. Furthermore, my digital work stems from a fourth-wave feminist perspective, which draws upon new technologies to inspire and celebrate feminist action. Mendes, Ringrose and Keller (2019, p. 1, emphasis in original) reflect this positioning and assert that "new formations of feminism and diverse feminist communities *do* exist and are being reimagined and expanded through the use of new media".

Throughout my PhD, which took place both before and throughout the pandemic, I created three practice-based explorations, documentation of which can be found on my website sophieswoffer.wixsite.com/xxxitsusxxx. I recommend going to my website and watching the digital performance work titled *It's Us!* before reading the main body of this article. My performance art practice investigates alternative hyper-femininities and monstrosities. To investigate monstrous elements of femininity, I have carefully created and performed through specific, subversive personae throughout each work.

For each of these personae, I take as my starting point specific Hollywood archetypes, such as the young unknowing Hollywood 'starlet' and the ageing 'diva' Hollywood actress. My definition of the starlet is a conventionally, yet unattainably glamorous and attractive young woman who is often groomed, controlled, and limited by patriarchal structures. Susan Sontag discusses this fetishisation of the young female in her 1972 article *The Double Standard of Aging* and critiques how in patriarchal ideology, the "ideal state proposed for women is docility, which means not being fully grown up" (1972, p. 293). This docility positions the starlet as pliable and easy to control. The heteronormative glamour of the docile starlet is carefully and deliberately constructed by the aforementioned masculinised structures and developed to become the starlet's most defining quality through which she is then given meaning. This young objectified woman is positioned as a star'let' and not a star, as she is perceived by theorists, such as Laura Mulvey who builds on Sigmund Freud's writings, as somehow lacking,

and infantilized in order to neutralise and contain her potential as threat. My engagement with the concept of the starlet originates from Mulvey's influential psychoanalytical feminist essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1989 [1975]), which investigated women on screen in the classical Hollywood era as objects of a dominant misogynistic gaze. I will be returning to and interrogating this theory later in this article.

The diva is regarded as a post-menopausal figure who has decades worth of experience and reputation but has exceeded her 'prime' position as a desirable star. Unlike the starlet, who is perceived in a state of becoming, the diva is firmly present and is moving toward the threat of being 'past it'. The diva's age, therefore, makes her incompatible with the male gaze, and her larger-than-life persona makes her less 'docile' and therefore less containable than the starlet. I am working in close dialogue with Mulvey's essay on the male gaze demonstrating how my practice builds on, re-envisages, and disrupts this theory. Moreover, I place my own practice in dialogue with feminist artists who subvert the male gaze and use my performance art to facilitate new ways of thinking about and challenging the theorisations of the masculinised viewer. Through my research, I re-envisage the aforementioned archetypes through a feminist lens in order to disrupt and dislodge the dynamics of patriarchal systems that surround and limit those archetypes whilst also providing new innovative and feminist destinations for those figures. This is most significant for the starlet archetype, who is particularly vulnerable within a post #MeToo context.

The first of my three doctoral performance works directly responds to issues surrounding the starlet figure. *It's Sophie!* (2018), was a live performance work which explored the agentive potential of the starlet, rejecting patriarchal definitions that position her as an unknowing and a passive object. The second performance, also live, entitled *It's Big Mouth!* (2020), celebrated the ageing diva archetype as an embodiment of feminist camp excess, whilst challenging the 'narrative of decline' (Gullette, 1997) that is associated with older women. My third performance *It's Us!* (2021), which took place amongst the effects of the pandemic, consequently took the form of an online video-based performance work and facilitated a culminative exploration into how the starlet and diva might exist together and share the digital space, pointing towards the importance of feminist camaraderie. Throughout this performance practice, I have drawn on intermedial technologies (Kattenbelt, 2014; Lavender, 2019; Scott and Barton, 2019) to add further disruptive potential to my performances of monstrosity and depictions of feminine otherness. I used projection and multiplied images to layer mediatised versions of the self in each performance, creating an intermedial environment that is characterised by the excess of my feminine image. The writings of *Hélène* Cixous are particularly useful to consider here through their emphasis on productively feminine multiplicity and states of excess. This is evidenced through her 1976 essay *The Laugh of Medusa*, where Cixous contends that for women there is a "wonder of being several" and that "she doesn't defend herself against these unknown women whom she's surprised at becoming, but derives pleasure from this gift of alterability" (1976, p. 876). My creative utilisation of digital technologies provides a way to explicitly explore this thread of multiplicity that acts as a through line throughout my practice. The specific varied ways that I have deployed digitised technology throughout my practice significantly evolved and developed in unexpected but fruitful ways due to the pandemic, which brought with it different challenges and new forms of creative labour and potential due to *It's Us!* having to take place online.

The main body of this article begins by discussing the specific aspects of Mulvey's theory of the male gaze that I productively disrupt and expand on with my digital performance *It's Us!*.

I also make use of Cixous' writings, reiterating and developing the aforementioned significance of Cixous work on the multifaceted and unpredictable quality of femininity, which works against the notion of their being a singular fixed form of feminine identity. I also make reference to the practice of sex-positive artist Penny Slinger, detailing how I have built upon her playful creative techniques which disrupt and challenge the notion of stereotypical femininty. I focus in detail on *It's Us!* exploring and highlighting my innovative feminist approaches and methodologies to digital practice that I undertook throughout the pandemic, which can be adopted by the feminist video maker. These strategies include the practice of 'vidding', specific feminist approaches to video editing and feminist irony as a performative tactic.

Starting points: Disrupting the 'male gaze'

Laura Mulvey's (1989) essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' was ground-breaking at its time of release for psychoanalytical film theory. As a starting point, Mulvey draws upon Sigmund Freud's writings on fetishism, which, she explains, "involves a displacing of woman's imaginary castration onto a variety of reassuring but often surprising objects…which serve as *signs* for the lost penis" (1989, p. 10-11). Therefore, Mulvey suggests that it is man's narcissistic fear of losing his own phallus that encourages him to perceive woman as fetish object, which serves to function as a distraction away from that anxiety. The image of women as fetish object is therefore displayed for masculinised consumption whilst 'connoting male fantasy' (1989, p. 21). Mulvey is drawing our attention to the fact that within this viewing dynamic, the 'active' notion of looking is associated with the masculinised viewer and male protagonist in the film, and the female image functions as 'passive' spectacle (1989, p. 22).

Forty years have passed since Mulvey warned us of the masculinised position of the spectator in Hollywood films of the 1940s and 1950s, and critics, including Mulvey herself, have challenged the outdated elements of this theory, which include ignoring the female spectator, not addressing the racial implications of the male gaze and only considering a heteronormative gaze (Doane, 1982; Kaplan, 1982; Mayne, 1991). My research and practice work in dialogue to re-envisage Mulvey's thoughts on the male gaze. My PhD thesis disrupted the male gaze as critiqued by Mulvey, by pushing against it through my own feminist performance art practice. By doing this, I have worked to uncover new subversive potential within the theory, rather than dismissing the theory as purely outdated and non-productive for feminist work. I argue, therefore, that there is still positive potential for disruption within Mulvey's original 1970's theoretical discussion around the male gaze. Firstly, within my practice, I expand Mulvey's thinking by presenting a hyper-femininity, which is a magnified and transgressive version of the traditional and heteronormative femininity that Mulvey discusses. My practice then directly disrupts the theorised idea that the masculine equates with activity and the feminine with passivity, which Mulvey suggests is "embedded not just in the image/object being looked at, but embedded in the gaze of the viewer (traditionally characterised as *male)*" (1989, p. 18). A way that I disrupt this gendered assumption of power is through filling the roles of not only a performer but director camera operator and video editor throughout my practice. These were all roles that were used within the classical Hollywood era to perpetuate and encourage a sexualised view of women on screen. Yet, within my performance and film work, I work against, and offer alternatives to, this style of spectating. Through doing this, I take stock of my own feminine image and how it is to be

consumed by the spectator. Mulvey considers the camera and how it is used within classical Hollywood film, as an enforcement of patriarchy. Here Mulvey is building on Freud's terminology of 'scopophilia,' which means to take pleasure and gratification from images of women on film, treating them as "objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (Mulvey, 1989: 17). Yet, I expand beyond Mulvey's theorising of the male gaze within my practice, and specifically in my digital performance *It's Us!*, which I will discuss in detail later on, by performing as both the subject and object of my own disruptively excessive and multiple femininity. Being simultaneously subject and object is not something that is considered by Mulvey in her original publication, but it is a technique that I perceive as essential in my practice for subverting misogynist patriarchy. Whilst doing this, I use my practice to make my audiences aware of their own role and complicity within the ongoing effects of the masculinised gaze and to encourage them to perceive ways to disrupt it within their everyday lives. Moreover, throughout my practice, I work toward removing the sense of separation between audience and performer, which Mulvey (1989) discusses as an element that is enforced by the set-up of the cinema auditorium. Instead, I utilise specific and varied performative tactics to directly address and acknowledge the spectator. This article works to address these tactics throughout.

Mulvey's recent revisitations of her germinal essay emphasise the issues present within the original publication. In her 2015 article *The Pleasure Principle*, Mulvey states how modes of spectatorship "were always more complex than the "Visual Pleasure" essay allowed, and the "male gaze" could always be transgressed by anyone who cares to assert their own sexual identity and proclivity" (2015, p. 51). Mulvey expands these thoughts in her 2019 book *Afterimages,* which consists of essays and writings that Mulvey published after her 2006 book *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image.* In *Afterimages,* Mulvey responds to the varied and valid line of critique and questioning surrounding her original theorisations of the male gaze.[2] Building on and moving beyond Mulvey's recent complications of the theory, I re-envisage the model through my own practical explorations of the resilient possibilities for the contemporary feminist performance maker. These possibilities are then produced through a revised challenge to an ongoing heteronormative masculinised gaze. Moreover, I use my own feminist performance art to uncover new ways of disrupting, reclaiming, and deconstructing the male gaze, to produce and celebrate innovative alternatives to heteronormative femininity. I am highlighting these feminist possibilities throughout this article, which were expanded on during the pandemic through the use of innovative digital strategies of making performance.

Covid disruption & 'Vidding'

I am now going to discuss my disrupted approach to my performance *It's Us!* (2021). This performance investigated how the starlet and the diva might join forces, share space and exist alongside one another in order to eradicate the patriarchal studio systems of the classical Hollywood era, as well as its misogynist legacy in contemporary Hollywood. *It's Us!* was a piece of digital practice-based research, which consisted of an introductory clip and

[2] In a 2011 interview with Roberta Sassatelli, Mulvey contends that her original 1975 essay was "written as a polemic" and that she "had no interest in modifying the argument, it had to be rigorous, to attack as it were" (2011, p. 128). This sense of militancy within the writing is reflective of the 1970s as a time that required drastic change.

three ten-minute performance videos that were embedded within a website that I had created.

Lauren Barri Holstein is a provocative, contemporary feminist performance artist who also works with persona and highlights how the application of practice-based research allows for the practitioner to "enact" alternative possibilities of the research (cited in Kartsaki, 2016, p. 120). Holstein explains how through this methodology, the performer "has the potential to produce, generate and create in the moment of enactment" (ibid.). Therefore, in the moment of creative play, the performer can test out and find alternate ways of embodying their research which would not be possible through desk-based research (ibid.). This builds on Smith and Dean's findings about practice-based research, which assert that this kind of research brings "with it new ways of thinking about research and new methodologies for conducting it," along with "a raised awareness of the different kinds of knowledge that creative practice can convey" (2009, p. 1). Due to COVID-19, my entire approach to making performance had to shift by finding innovative 'non-live' ways of making practice-based research around alternative femininities and the male gaze. I 'enacted' the possibilities of my research, as Holstein encourages, through adopting and learning new possibilities of making creative, feminist digital practice instead of live performance work. As Smith and Dean (2009) emphasise, I had to consider and take on new methodologies of making creative work, that differed to my previous practice through not including my live performing body or a live audience. Whilst the move online presented some limitations, such as not being able to witness the live reactions of my spectators, it also offered new and exciting intermedial techniques of acquiring agency.

In order to create my own digital video works, I built on the creative methodology of 'vidding'. Rebecca Tushnet states how the "genre of vidding, [is] a type of remix made mostly by women" which "demonstrates how creativity can be disruptive, and how that disruptiveness is often tied to ideas about sex and gender" (2011, p. 2134). Tushnet continues to explain how "'vidders' make 'vids,' which are 're edited footage from television shows and movies," that focus on guiding the spectator through "revisioned images" (2011, p. 2135). It is a practice that grew out of media fandom (ibid.), and Morgan Dawn (2018) outlines how the history of 'vidding' "focuses on a small slice of time and space: the community of women who were fans of TV and movies popular in the Western world" in the 1970s through to the 1990s[3]. I utilised the practice of vidding by actively remixing old footage of Hollywood actresses with my own filmed work to produce a feminist alternative to the patriarchal narrative of the Hollywood studio system that dominated a large portion of these actresses' careers. I drew specifically on TV interview appearances of Hollywood actresses at later stages in their career, when they are older and when the studio system is beginning to collapse. In these moments of practice, I re-envisioned these Hollywood figures as having an agency and autonomy that was not controlled and limited by the patriarchal studio. For instance, I had carefully selected moments from films and interviews that showed these actresses in particularly empowered moments and then contrasted this with footage of less glamorous aspects of their later careers. This served to display and critique how the ageing Hollywood actresses were often type cast in grotesque roles in B-rated horror films once they reached a certain age, which used characters such as senile hags and crones to present female ageing as a site of monstrous spectacle. I drew specifically on these exploitation films for this trailer in terms of

[3] I acknowledge that vidding processes have been enhanced by social media and the popularity of creating video content but I am deliberately harking back to the earlier practice of vidding.

the aesthetic and as part of reclaiming these later performances. I used this aspect of vidding to find out what feminist potential might be possible in this alternate, digital reality that I created within *It's Us!.* Moreover, I employed the creative methodology of vidding throughout my practice, by re-organising and editing old footage, to facilitate a refreshed and disruptive interpretation for the spectator and enhancing that disruption through my own contemporary filmed footage.

Figure 1. Image of projection on curtain from *It's Big Mouth!*

The creative methodology of vidding was one that I had started to work with in previous performance *It's Big Mouth!*, which took place in 2020 before I fully immersed myself within the methodology for *It's Us!.* Indeed, COVID enabled me to engage in greater depth and breadth with the practice of vidding. For the opening section of *It's Big Mouth!,* I created and projected a film title sequence and trailer for the performance that was made up of footage of myself performing a constructed persona of the diva archetype, mashed up with moments of film that depicted famous onscreen divas, such as Joan Crawford, Marlene Dietrich, Lana Turner, along with Gloria Swanson and Bette Davis. This aesthetic decision heightened and made explicit the construction behind my intermedial performance techniques, along with emphasising the construction of the diva archetype as one that is rooted within an exaggerated camp aesthetic, which I discuss further in this writing. This footage was then projected onto a large curtain that hung at the back of the performance space, thus referencing the mechanisms of cinema projection, and enlarging the diva's image, reiterating her excess.

I edited my opening film sequence together in a way that would juxtapose earlier moments of an actress' career with later appearances in 'Hag Horror' films to emphasise how Hollywood rejected and humiliated these women as they aged. These sorts of films emerged in the early 1960s and are what Peter Shelley termed "Grande Dame Guignol" (2009), also known as "Hag

Horror" cinema (Fisiak, 2019, p. 8)[4]. Moreover, 'Hag Horror' films are crafted to highlight the older female characters' narrative of ageing as monstrous, which problematically reflected the Hollywood studios' perceptions of their ageing female stars. For example, I included a shot of Crawford delivering a provocative aside in *Mildred Pierce* (1945) and a clip of her image being grotesquely sliced in half by an axe for the trailer for William Castle's horror B film *Strait Jacket* (1964). These two opposing shots displayed how Crawford's star persona shifted throughout her career due to the camp, grotesque roles that she was cast in as she became older. *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane* (1962), as Robertson explains, "imprinted the image of Joan Crawford as a neurotic female grotesque – all flashing eyes, padded shoulders, and maniacally clenched teeth" (Robertson, 1999, p. 87). Through editing contrasting shots together, I made explicit to my audience the patriarchal treatment of ageing actresses within Hollywood and instead placed them within my own digitally constructed environment. I built on this consideration of my own feminist digital environment when I began to make my next performance *It's Us!.*

It's Us!

With the move online of *It's Us!*, I contend that I was able to facilitate an additional level of agency as maker of the practice. Constructing the website and, thus, the virtual environment with which my spectators engaged, enabled an additional level of control over the work. As such, I drew on fourth-wave feminism's emphasis on online activism as a way of mobilising collective action through digital means. Mendes, Ringrose and Keller discuss how "new media" is being used to "organise to challenge contemporary sexism, misogyny, and rape culture" (2019, p. 1). They continue to state that the "increased visibility of these activist initiatives is largely due to the ways that digital technologies are being used in creative and innovative ways" (Mendes, Ringrose and Keller, 2019, p. 2). I position my practice in *It's Us!* as coming from this kind of orientation. Usually, when I perform, I work within a building owned by an academic institution, which has its own set of rules to which my live performing body is expected to adhere, but for *It's Us!* I felt I was able to break away to a greater degree from the institution and instead created a space on my terms[5].

I presented *It's Us!* as an exclusive 'star at home' tour, that allowed my spectators, or my 'fans', as I addressed them in the piece, to peruse 'Ms Swoffer's' house. Spectators were commanded to meet me in the foyer via an online invitation, which took them to the homepage of my website. Further instructions were then given on how to enter the rooms of my home, which were my bathroom, my kitchen and my boudoir. I chose these rooms due to their differing functions and gendered social expectations. I purposefully selected spaces that were often

[4] Fisiak continues to explain how Hag Horror cinema is "a conflation of high camp, Gothic excess, superfluous theatricality" along with a "boundless nostalgia for the Golden Era of Hollywood" (2019: 318). Hag Horror films often depict an exaggerated demise of an older female character, who is, as Fisiak explains "struggling to face the inevitable process of aging and dying, she gradually succumbs to mental and physical illnesses that strengthen the trauma and lead to her social exclusion" (2019, p. 318).

[5] However, when making this work, I was aware that I did not have full ownership of the digital space, as I created the website using the company Wix, and so it does display Wix branding. Yet, my use of the free option that Wix provides offered a partial release from absolute containment by the company and displayed my effort to not be caught within the platform that showcases my work. This was not a complete freedom from commercialism, but it was a knowing push towards that freedom in a theatrical space that was constructed on my terms.

featured in 'stars at home' articles, such as the bedroom, which was seen as an enticing private space with its links to female glamour and sexuality. I selected the kitchen space due to its positioning in these magazine features as a functional space for the female star to convey her domesticity. I was interested in how I could disrupt and trouble the preconceptions of each of these classic spaces and create personae that did not engage in expected or appropriate behaviour within them. I chose to create a bathroom video as a means of undoing the notion of the perfect Hollywood star, by exposing a usually secret aspect of 'Ms Swoffer's' life and home.

The Domme / Star Persona

Using my own name immediately played with the boundaries of the real, but also clearly served to develop the 'star' persona being performed. Moreover, in *It's Us!*, I introduced a third persona, the 'star', which I interpreted as a diva in training. This persona sat chronologically between the young starlet and the ageing diva archetypes. If we consider the starlet as a trainee in her craft, and the diva as an established figure who can choose to use or reject her position of respectability, I presented the star as the embodiment of consummate professionalism, fully embedded within her role. Throughout *It's Us!*, I present a connection between the 'Domme' archetype and the star figure. I achieved this through crafting my 'star' persona in 'The Kitchen' as a threatening dominatrix-style figure. Danielle J. Lindemann suggests that the Dominatrix is "perceived with an unsteady mixture of repulsion, disinterest, concern, amusement, and fascination" (2010, p. 9). Therefore, within The Kitchen space within *It's Us!*, I built on the culturally understood threat/fascination dichotomy of the female dominatrix, as a tactic to demand attention whilst exerting control over the viewer of the screen. This was an attempt to enhance the agentive domination achieved by my live performing body occupying the same space as the spectator in my previous two performances. Moreover, the use of the Domme/Star was a performative tactic to demand the attention of the spectator and not to allow them to be distracted, wherever they were watching the work.

Developing on this context of threat, I positioned the Domme/Star as having murderous potential, continuing the sense of threat that surrounds the murderous and senile ageing female characters in Hag Horror. I expanded this threat in The Kitchen into one that celebrated the feminist capacity of both the diva and the Domme/Star, for, as Thais E. Morgan outlines, "in her ambiguity and excess the dominatrix confounds more than delights the male spectator, putting into jeopardy his gaze of power" (1989, p. 7). My directorial direction of the spectator's gaze through this fully digital performance intensified that experience of jeopardy. Moreover, this sense of 'confounding' was something that I deliberately deployed with spectators of *all* genders who might utilise the male gaze. There is a clear connection between the figure of the dominatrix and the figure of the diva in the making, as each of their displays of excess position them as a threat to the masculinised gaze. I perceive all three of my personae (starlet/star/diva) as having a relationship to the Domme. The starlet should be viewed as the trainee Domme, the star as the Domme figure, and the diva as moving through and beyond the role of Domme to further levels of excess that materialise via adopting specialised aspects of the camp and the grotesque.

Figure 2. Still from The Kitchen in *It's Us!*

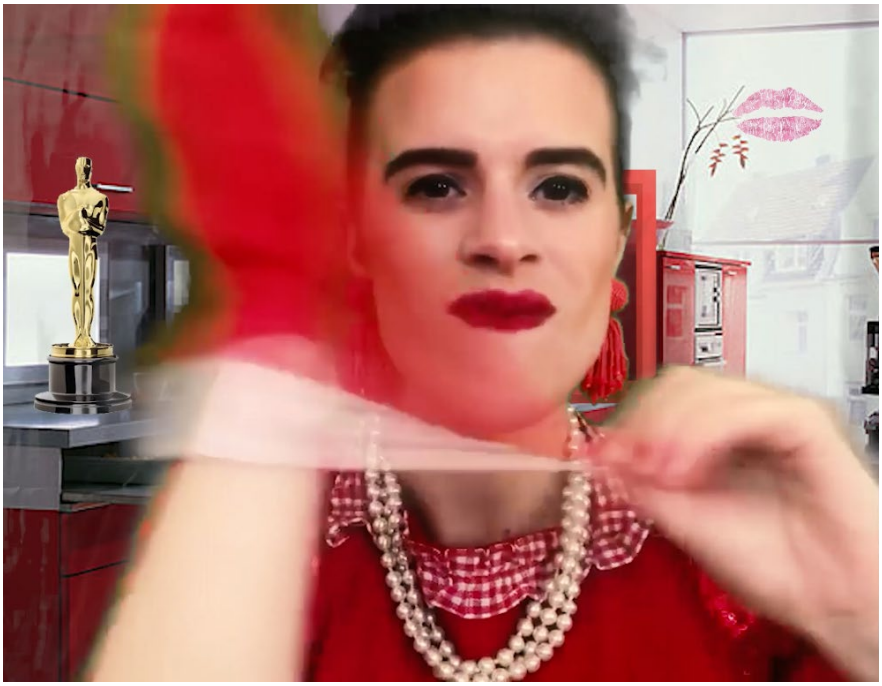

Figure 3. Still from The Kitchen *It's Us!*

I communicated the role of the Domme/Star through the ways in which she engaged with the space and audience as well as her relationship to food in The Kitchen. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1999) states that "food, and all that is associated with it, is already larger than life. It is already highly charged with meaning and affect. It is already performative and theatrical" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1999, p. 1). I perceived a connection between the understanding of the performativity of food and the theatricality of the Domme figure. The Domme is also "highly charged with meaning and affect," and aligns with Bobby Baker's justification of how in her performance practice, food refers to her "role as a woman as a sort of provider or

nourisher" (Heathfield, 1999, p. 98) or feeder. I positioned the Domme as representative of the potential of the phallic mother in her capacity to overwhelm. This positioning of the phallic mother moved beyond Baker's less aggressive use of food. I explored this through emphasising the role of the maternal provider, through moments of infantilising and force-feeding the audience via the camera lens. Figure 2 demonstrates how I edited the footage to accentuate an aspect of intrusion, which was further exaggerated through lines such as "I have worked so hard to put food on the table, so you will eat!".

A feminist approach to editing

When editing the footage for *It's Us!*, I built on my previous experience of vidding in *It's Big Mouth!* in order to develop my own distinctively feminist digital environment. This manifested through a feminist approach to editing that was joyously rooted within a sense of feminist irony, which Lydia Rainford (cited in Gorman, 2021, p. 31) suggests is a form of "internalised agency" for the female performer. Firstly, in *It's Us!*, I deliberately commanded the masculine tools of digital technology and employed them as a female artist to exaggeratedly reveal the construction of fetishized femininity. However, I was also working in acknowledgement of Melanie Ball's recent writings on women's roles within British film production in the 1930s. Ball (2021) discusses how the increase in British film production in the 30s "created a demand for "feminine" labour," which materialised through "editing roles". Ball explains how *Picturegoer* magazine in the early 1930's ran features that advertised Film Production as an "attractive employment destination for women" with feature titles such as "Lady with Scissors" (2021, p. 3). Yet, Bell states that "the usual male self-aggrandizement was a gendered narrative" within the British film industry and that women's place within it "was being imagined in increasingly narrow terms" (2021, p. 11). Through my digital editing role in *It's Us,* I re-imagined the 'Lady with Scissors' as the 'Domme with the Knife', a figure that cuts out and crafts her own agency through editing digital work.

The Kitchen specifically showcased my feminist approach to video and audio editing that I deployed throughout *It's Us!.* When considering the video practice within this digital room, it is useful to refer to Mulvey's writings on the 'pensive spectator' who is a different type of spectator to the cinematic spectator that she addressed in the 70s. The pensive spectator, through the use of newer homemade viewing technologies, can pause the action bringing back "the resonance of the still photograph", whilst also choosing to watch certain moments again and again (Mulvey, 2006, p. 186). Having the option to pause the film also gives the spectator more opportunities to operate a covert objectifying gaze upon the female stars on screen in the comfort of their own homes. Therefore, Mulvey argues that as the "female spectator is now able to manipulate and control the image she can reverse the power relationship so central to the cinema of 24 frames a second, in which the female spectator was amalgamated into the male look, and the male protagonist controlled the dynamism and the drive of the image" (2006, p. 139). Yet, through *It's Us!* I also reversed the power relationship by engaging in 'vidding' processes by slicing up and reordering my footage, along with manipulating that footage to represent my body as a challenge to the male gaze. However, I developed this power reversal further. Whilst my spectators could pause my image, I carefully constructed each image to represent my body in a way that called the masculinised gaze into question, and I drove the image as the central protagonist/s. I then

extended this disruption of the masculinised forms of viewing through engaging in glitching as a performative technique.

Embracing the 'glitch' as a form of disruption

The Kitchen explicitly adopted an approach to video editing that celebrated and embraced the disruptive messiness of femininity through an engagement with 'glitching'. Glitching, as Rosa Menkmen states, has the "potential to interrogate conventions through crashes, bugs, errors and viruses" and to "productively damage the norms of techno-culture" (Menkmen, 2011, pp. 7-8). My feminist video practice built on this productive destabilising potential of the glitch and developed on the use of glitch art as a well-established form in new media art. Goriunova and Shulgin suggest that a glitch in software "is a mess that is a moment," and "a possibility to glance at software's inner structure" (cited in Sundén, 2008, p. 27). I was interested in how I could use the 'messy' or incomplete edit to draw attention to and expose the construction of my personae, and hence make explicit the construction of gender. This further located my practice within a tone of feminist irony, as Gorman explains how ironic work made by feminist performance artists is "deconstructive in so far as they draw attention back to the process of performance making and foreground expectation" (2021, p. 70)6. Indeed, I edited my footage in a way that disrupted the performance by revealing the 'inner structure' of the work and how my personae, with their specific approaches to femininity, were constructed.

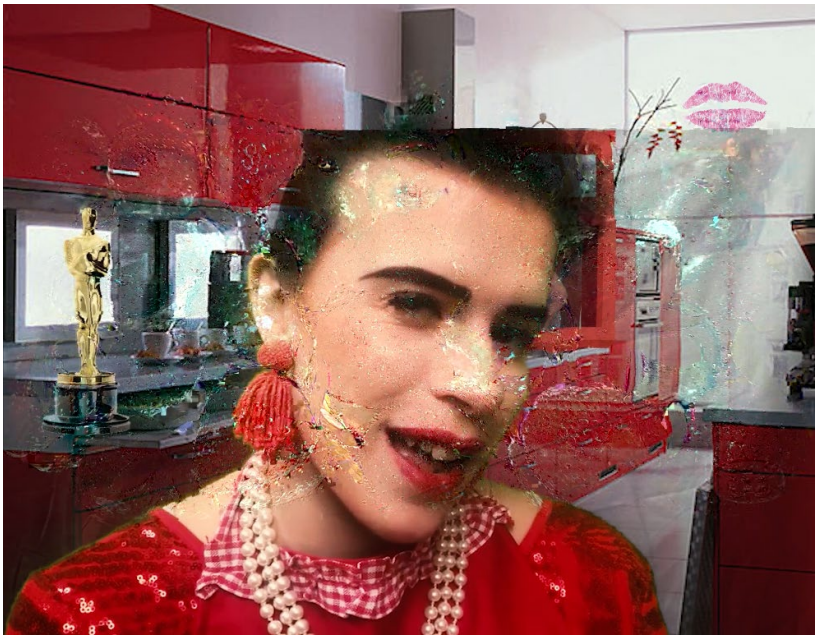

Figure 4. Still from The Kitchen in *It's Us!*

[6] This sense of feminist irony can also be seen in the innovative video work of feminist artist Rachel Maclean. In an interview with *The Herald,* Maclean suggests that within online work "you can go on and you can become something completely different, and you no longer need to be defined by your body and gender" (Jamieson, 2021). By creating digital grotesque and monstrous persona through video editing, Maclean is playfully drawing attention to the fact that her personae are constructed and I am building on this with my use of editing and glitching in this section.

Figure 5. Still from The Kitchen in *It's Us!*

Jenny Sundén argues that gender, femininity in particular, is something that is "fundamentally technological, *and hence broken*" (2016, p. 23, emphasis in original). In other words, Sundén suggests that femininity is a construction and thus likens gender to digital technology in that it is ultimately destined to have moments of disruptive glitching and failure. My DIY aesthetic in The Kitchen points towards Sundén's conclusion by portraying my image of femininity as often incomplete or broken in some way. As can be seen from Figure 4, I edited the footage together so that it purposefully cut off sections of my image, such as the top of my head. This emphasised to my audience how my digital image, along with my surrounding virtual environment, was artificially created, and therefore, always at risk too of failure[7].

This sense of technological risk further emphasised how my performance within The Kitchen trod a fine line between calm and chaos, in that I (as both artist and the Domme/Star) could choose to slice apart the digital image at any point and rebuild it. As you can see from Figure 5, I experimented with cropping out sections of my face from other pieces of footage and placing them within a new digitally manipulated image. I purposefully did so in a way that did not blend in or neatly combine these images, but instead emphasised their juxtaposition by creating a digital clash against its background. This can be likened to the practice of Penny Slinger, an artist whose practice I built on and developed in *It's Us!*. Slinger's artwork disrupts stereotypical, gendered roles and suggests a feminine identity for female-identifying individuals to explore that is joyously excessive and explosive. This is communicated through Slinger's 70s surrealist-inspired photocollage work that challenges her imposed 'feminine role' as object, through her playful parodies of normative femininity. My purposeful clashes within my digital environment can be compared to Slinger's process of collaging where she explains, in a 2016 interview with Alissa Clarke, how she "take[s] elements that are familiar, but you recombine them in a way, which is unsettling and unfamiliar", creating "relationship[s]

[7] Halberstam's writings in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) are particularly useful here when considering the liberating freedoms of failing against capitalist perceptions of success. Halberstam explains that "while failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative effects, such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair, it also provides the opportunity to use these negative effects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life" (2011, p. 3).

between things that opens you up into a new world" (Clarke, 2021, p. 45). This agency over the digital image along with the construction of the Domme/Star in this room served to further facilitate my sense of control over the space and over the spectator in a way that I did not achieve within my previous live performance works.

Tactics of disruption

This article demonstrated my original approach to disrupting the male gaze through innovative forms of feminist digital performance practice. I discussed how due to the pandemic and not being able to perform live, I have pursued creative digital alternatives that have proven just as productive in unravelling the masculinised gaze. Along with this, I highlighted how specific derided film figure archetypes can productively be questioned and interrogated through feminist performance art. I discussed strategies that can be productively adopted by the feminist video maker, including a combination of vidding practices, feminist video editing, threatening feminine personae and an application of feminist irony. These tactics were employed to reveal the exciting yet threatening unpredictability of femininity, along with celebrating and drawing attention to its construct.

In a post-performance discussion with my spectators, audience member and academic Kate Schaag discussed *It's Us!* as providing an "aesthetics of threat" towards both the viewer and the foundations of the male gaze. Shaag commented that "the masculinised gaze is no longer presented as the dominant style of viewing as the heteronormative male viewer is not able to identify with the threatening feminine personae on screen" (Schaag, 2021). This comment demonstrates how my efforts in destabilising and replacing the male gaze with a troubling sense of feminine irony threat, were triumphant. In *It's Us!*, the male anxiety at losing his own phallus was not distracted by a fetishised female image but heightened through the threat provided by the agentive feminine personae presented on screen.

Through using the digital to disrupt and provide alternatives to the masculinised gaze, I have also expanded the level of challenge that my live body posed in my previous performances and used intermedial technology to facilitate an enhanced state of aggression against damaging patriarchal power structures. Cixous asserts that "throughout literature masculine figures all say the same thing: "I'm reckoning" what to do to win," (1981, p. 47). Yet, through *It's Us!*, I created a digital 'aesthetic of threat' where winning is not an option for the masculinised gaze. There is only space for the feminine performer to be triumphant.

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