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School of the Arts
Virginia Commonwealth University

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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Table of Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	v
List of Figures	viii
Chapter	
1 We Am Connected	1
2 Click to View Profile, Add/Edit Content	5
<i>Phonejacker</i>	7
<i>Stripper Shoe</i>	11
3 Click to Insert Image, Upload, Apple-S	16
<i>Bootymeat</i>	20
<i>Reaction</i>	23
4 Log Out	26
References	23
Vita	26

List of Figures

	Page
Figure 1: Merry Christmas from Bailey the Unknown Reindeer.....	2
Figure 2: danah boyd on MyFriends, MySpace.....	2
Figure 3: <i>Phonejacker</i> Still 1	7
Figure 4: <i>Phonejacker</i> Still 2	7
Figure 5: <i>Tea Room</i> Still by William E Jones.....	11
Figure 6: <i>Stripper Shoe</i> Installation Still	11
Figure 7: <i>Stripper Shoe</i> Installation Still	11
Figure 8: lonelygirl15	17
Figure 9: <i>BootyCclipse</i> Still.....	18
Figure 10: <i>BootyCclipse</i> Still.....	18
Figure 11: <i>BootyMeat</i> (In) Still.....	20
Figure 12: <i>BootyMeat</i> (Out) Still.....	20
Figure 13: <i>Reaction</i> Still.....	23

Abstract

USERNAME TAB PASSWORD RETURN

By Andrea Leigh Nia Burks, MFA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MFA at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2009

Major Director: Paul Thulin

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<head>
<meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html; charset=ISO-8859-1" />
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<body> <p>Social Networking Site, User Generated Content, Screen Identity, Gender,
Sexuality, YouTube, Booty Video, Reaction Video, Digital Culture, Archive</p>
</body>
</html>

We Am Connected

As a digitally knowledgeable populace, we possess the freedom and means to present the self as we choose—an ability that no other generation to date has known. Web 2.0¹ and Social Networking Sites² have revolutionized personal communication and expression. They allow us to connect in novel and unprecedented ways, shattering old network paradigms. Ostensibly, geographical boundaries, unspoken class hierarchies, or social status no longer restricts us. By allowing instant and relatively anonymous methods of expression, we are provided with an opportunity to truly explore personas removed from geographically localized cultural frameworks that try to define who we are through the use of often arbitrary social constructs. With the availability to perform for an audience to which we hold no accountability, we are truly afforded freedom of identity. So why—when faced with the intoxicating possibility of the infinite—do we choose to imitate each other?

¹ Web 2.0 is defined as “a perceived second generation of web development and design, that aims to facilitate communication, secure information sharing, interoperability, and collaboration on the World Wide Web. Web 2.0 concepts have led to the development and evolution of web-based communities, hosted services, and applications; such as social-networking sites, video-sharing sites, wikis, blogs, and folksonomies.”
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0#Social_Work_2.0)

² Social Networking Sites is a service that “focuses on building online communities of people who share interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. Most social network services are web based and provide a variety of ways for users to interact, such as e-mail and instant messaging services.”
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_networking)

This imitation is most visible on sites that rely on User-Generated Content³, most notably, YouTube. Since it debuted in early 2005, YouTube has become the third most popular website in the world (Traffic Details, Alexa.com). Although it has been employed as a means to advertise products by companies, most of the site contains videos uploaded by users who create accounts, and share personal content with the world (or, if they so choose, no one, or perhaps, a set number of other “friend” contacts). The video content can (and does) range from a Harvard lecture series to an account holder’s happy dog romping through snow to a soundtrack of Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer.



Fig 1



Fig 2

Any person who knows of the YouTube website is aware of its variety of video content. This is part of the beauty, and usefulness of the site itself; anything (so long as it does not violate the Terms of Service Agreement!) can be found or uploaded. YouTube’s purpose is simple: a tool with which one can view, or be viewed (whether that be the self or content that the self deems important to be viewed).

YouTube falls in line with the basic idea of performance and power structure. Interestingly, in her 1975 essay, second wave feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey

³ User-Generated Content “refers to various kinds of media content, publicly available, that are produced by

popularized this idea in her essay, Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema, with a more specific reference to the male/female power dynamic in film. The formula is easy; there exists a spectator, and there exists an object. Mulvey defined the former as being inherently male and the latter being female. This, of course, is a bit different for YouTube, as both males and females both create and view whatever they want. However, her breakdown of performance before a camera is relevant to defining the YouTube formula, as well as much of the Internet's Social Networking and User-Generated Content sites. These sites include, but are not limited to, Facebook, MySpace, Flickr, Wiki⁴, and Twitter. They can be based in or include text, still image, sound, and moving image.

YouTube is the main focus of my work, not only because of its popularity among web connected people, but because it involves the moving image, and is therefore more interactive and dynamic. Through this dissertation, and as explored through my artwork, I examine performance, power, and access issues related to YouTube. This paper aims to observe, participate in, and assess the ways in which account holders have employed the site as a means to bring these subjects into question. Through the examination of popular video subject matter, I will specifically address the gender and sexual identity exploration of the digital youth culture. By exploring and recontextualizing popular YouTube videos, one can reveal how stereotypes and social constructs are changing, remaining stagnant, and/or what contemporary identity issues could potentially

end-users" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User-generated_content)

⁴ Because the nature of this subject is based in content that is defined and created by the user, definitions of terminology are often times fashioned by the users themselves. The users, as well as the developers, are creating the language employed to discuss the subject of User-Generated Content. In light of this advance in web culture, the terminologies defined in the footnotes of this paper shall be cited using the actual movement that they reference.

surface for youth culture. As an observer as well as a participant in digital culture, I intend to raise questions and ideas rooted in both analysis as well as personal experience.

Click to View Profile, Add/Edit Content

Arriving at the state in which my artwork currently exists has been a long journey. It started many years ago, upon the simple, yet jarring fact that people constantly perform the self that they want you to engage. My experiences in strip clubs over the years have provided me with an astute awareness, of the extent to which people consciously perform in an effort to gain what they desire. However, my willingness to accept the reality/fantasy line that I crossed while at the clubs was compromised because of my need to stay grounded. Sometimes, ignorance really can be bliss. The days of ignorance to the environment I existed within were short, giving way under the constant weight of “Oh my God, is this really happening?”.

My years of undergraduate interest in gender and sexuality theory taught me basic but core ideas, in particular, Judith Butlers feminist theory which states that gender, is in fact, a social construct (Butler, Gender Trouble) and exists as something separate from sexuality. In addition, Sherry Turkle’s theories regarding web identity exploration as therapy, specifically with women who, according to her, have a non-linear approach to the web has also served as part of a framework for the art process (Everyone, Wikipedia). This idea has laid the groundwork for the progression of my artwork.

At first, without realizing it my early artwork developed and evolved around my experiences in strip clubs. Upon critical reflection, it became evident to me that the

common conceptual thread within my work was rooted in the emotional effects of my performances within such environments. This realization sparked my desire to research ways in which I have observed, created and participated in such performances. My artworks began to concentrate on hyper-performance, and my emotional, mental, physical and theoretical responses to my own life. Much like the idea of the strip tease, my work has never existed in a neutral state. My work, like the tease thrives on extremes and clear cut roles based on stereotypes and audience expectations. Sex is all sex. Anger is 100% anger. Performance, is over performance. Confusion was all consuming confusion. This chapter will list and explain the work that aided in transporting me to the state that my work currently exists. These works are conscious reactions to unconscious reactions.

Phonejacker

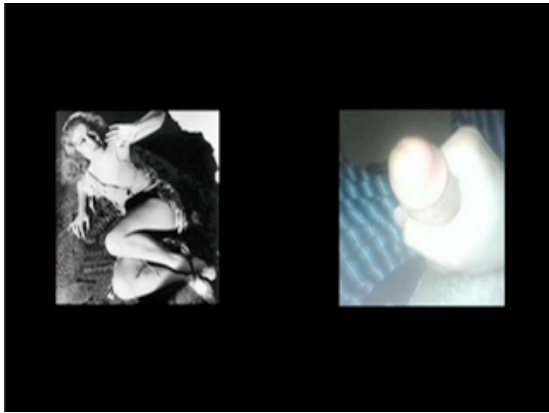


Fig 3

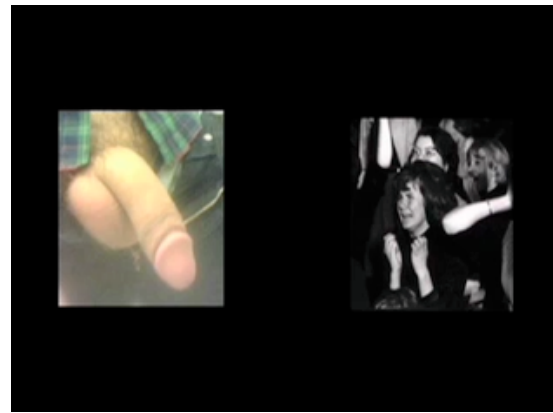


Fig 4

Phonejacker is a video work that explores the relationship between like/dislike, desire/abuse, and curiosity/aversion. The main visual focus of the piece is a series of appropriated images of an erect penis, typically in the midst of masturbation. The majority of the penis photos are from the eye level perspective of the male photographing himself. The imagery exists in mass, almost never repeating. They are degraded in quality, suggesting that they came from a cell phone and originated as a result of the relationship between myself and the man who took the photos. In addition, throughout the course of *Phonejacker*, seemingly random photos flicker in tandem with the erect penises. These images are appropriated from Beetle Mania and classic horror film stills such as King Kong and Psycho. Within *Phonejacker*, the sound and visuals are synched; when the penis photos and Beetle Mania images flicker back and forth, the viewer hears excitement in the women's voices. When the horror movie stills and penis photos play, the viewer hears screams of shock and horror coming from the soundtrack.

“Phonejacker” is a nickname that I created for an individual who began to randomly send me text message photos and videos of his erect penis while masturbating. The images first came as a shock, but then eventually became an expected and appreciated part of my life. He loved to send them, and I generally loved to receive them. However, some days the messages were unwanted, confusing and occasionally more vulgar than usual. Other days, it was disappointing not to receive the daily photo or video. Sometimes, the “Phonejacker” would be upset if there was not an immediate reaction via text message. Other days, he would require a special request regarding camera angle or photo/video preference. The relationship, although emotionally and socially complex, never progressed past the wireless connection.

Phonejacker is a statement about the power dynamic between individuals who are involved in mediated social actions (performers) and how the reactions (audience) can be complicated. The motivational lines between sadistic abuse and exhibitionist desire on the part of the doer can often times vary from blurry, to non existent, or even crystal clear. The receiver’s reaction, in this case myself, can also fluctuate from inviting, impressed, repulsed, aroused, or any other combination one can come up with. Regarding the pop culture appropriation, the Beetle Mania and horror film images served their purpose on a different layer. They are clear and recognizable symbols of excitement and fear to almost all western people. Beetle Mania snapshots of young women excited to exaggerated levels are intended to represent my delight with the almost daily images from my “Phonejacker”. The overly exaggerated faces of shock and fear in the form of classic horror film women such as Fay Wray serve as a way of displaying disgust with him and the occasional feeling

of powerlessness I would experience. The mix of both reactions exists simultaneously. It was never one more than the other. It was abuse. It was a treat. The possession of power could not be assigned to one person or the other. He depended on me to receive and respond to his exhibitionist desire and I depended on him for the attention he gave me through responding to him. Power was often shifted and in a constant state of flux throughout the duration of the relationship. This mediated relationship allows for a unique experience and blurred reaction. If the “Phonejacker” were a flasher, my reaction would have been quite different. There was something about the cell phone that made it safer for me. Although there are major issues of access within the work, the act wasn’t as threatening as it would have been in real life, because within the cell phone, one can have and not have access at the exact same time. In other words, it seems more harmless.

The current sexting⁵ phenomenon among teenagers and young adults has brought many of the formerly stated issues to the surface. It is almost as if an act or fantasy cannot exist any longer unless there is proof. The images on a screen is now the proof. Such ramifications of this phenomenon include false creating a false sense of safety, diluted awareness and respect for access and the gaze, and unwarranted distrust within the youth/adult relationships.

With reference to Sherry Turkle’s research on screen identity and interaction, Pamela McCorduck states that “Modernist birthday parties had cakes, candles, presents, and games; the main game at postmodern birthday parties is watching and commenting on

⁵ Sexting , is “a portmanteau of “sex” and “texting” is the act of sending sexually explicit messages or photos electronically, primarily between cell phones.” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexting>)

the video's just shot" (McCorduck, Sex, Lies and Avatars). Can the relationship between "Phonejacker" and myself be considered my generation's version of flirtation?

This piece asks many complex questions, to which answers do not exist. Why would one do this? Why would the receiver like it? Why sometimes hate it? Why would one engage in such an unstable interaction? Who possesses the power? *Phonejacker* functions as a beginning to the series of my current work about gender, power, performance and motive.

My interest in the appropriated image (specifically of a sexualized nature) as form was fueled by such work as William E. Jones' *Tearoom*. This piece is a film comprised of minimally edited appropriated footage taken from a public restroom in Ohio. The footage depicts men in different stages of homosexual encounters, which were later used as evidence to convict the men of committing crimes. According to his statement, "The unedited scenes of ordinary men of various races and classes meeting to have sex were so powerful that the director decided to present the footage with a minimum of intervention. *Tearoom* is a radical example of film presented "as found" for the purpose of circulating historical images that have otherwise been suppressed." (Artists, 2008)



Fig 5

Stripper Shoe⁶

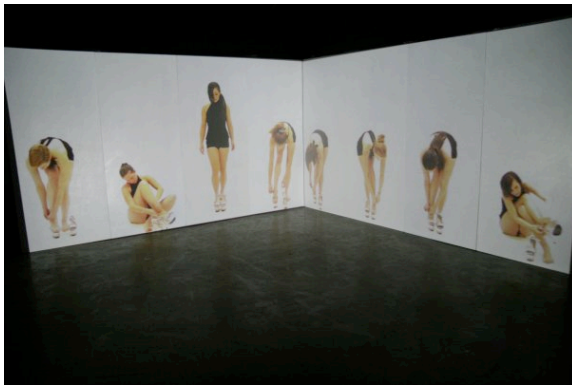


Fig 6

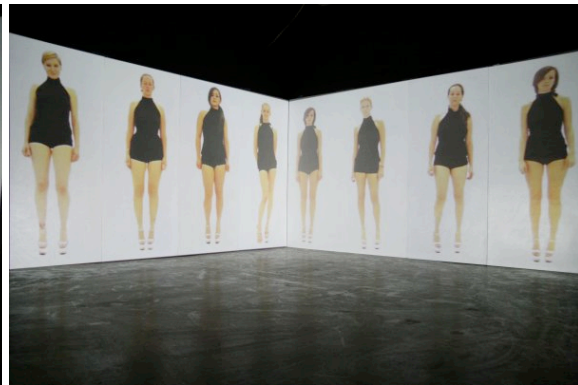


Fig 7

There is a specific type of shoe often associated with strippers and sexualized performance—the clear acrylic platform heel. Typically, these shoes are translucent, spiked in the heel, and tend to increase the performer’s height by 6-8 inches. Under the

⁶ The models in the work are strip club employees whose careers range from 3 shifts to 10+ years. Although there was a deliberate choice to use only dancers, it is not necessary that the viewer know this. Despite their methods of money earning, they are still women who deserve to be defined as such and not limited to their job title. This choice to leave out their job title as a defining factor in how they are perceived by their audience allows them to be what they are, women.

dated neon and black lighting, these shoes give the illusion that the performer is floating on stage.

Due to the shoe's exaggerated shape, the performer's body is often contorted into an unnatural and hyper-sexualized position—the breasts are thrust forward, the back arches and the buttocks protrude. She looks elongated, taller and thinner, thus one step closer to the idealistic and unattainable norm set forth by both her and her male counterpart. The height at which she stands is abnormal for an average woman, ranging from 5'10" to 6'8". She must look down on her customer, reinforcing the notion that height equals power. She is a fantasy, discarding the role of the performer to become the performance itself; essentially, she is no longer *a* woman, but instead represents *all* women.

In *Stripper Shoe*, I have adopted this particular shoe as a visual cue, using its cultural semiotic value to signify the tautological relationship between gender and sexuality—both in popular culture and the strip club industry as a whole. Through careful choreography and orchestrated movement, the interaction between the shoes and the performers in the piece are meant to evoke the image of the female dancer, questioning the paradoxical dualism raised by the uneasy tension between the *object* and *desire*. Finally, the piece addresses the absence of individual identity in the feminine ideal, as reinforced through patterns of signification based on Western expectations and objectification.

One should note that these shoes represent a hyper-sexualized, hyper-feminized, over-exaggerated, and male-focused existence only within the context of the performer's actions. Once wearing the shoes, the role of the performer is to blur the distinction between gender and sexuality for the physical, mental, and emotional gratification of the

presumably male customer—thus reinforcing the popular social constructs that broadly define what is normally considered feminine.

For the most part, the actions and wardrobe of each girl in a strip club do not differ from 10-300 of other girls that she might be working with that night. The outfits expose and hide the same relative amount of flesh as the next girl; the “important” parts remain covered, both to remain within the boundaries of local law and to maintain a sense of mystery, so as not to “spoil” the finale. Aside from the minor details, not much else is left to the imagination; the movements remain the same from one girl to the next, fitting an established routine that is designed to simultaneously please the male customer while redefining her identity, completing the transformation from *person* to *object*.

But it is, in the end, just a game—an orchestrated performance of an illusory ideal that can only be realized through carefully choreographed fantasy. In the work itself, the movements of the performers are timed so that they follow a near-perfect wave. This repeated motion references the literal performance that women enact in tandem as a result of cultural constructs and heteronormative expectations, whether it be as a series of patriarchal demands or as pressure from other women who are competing for attention and money. The dress and movements of the performers have little to no variance; the viewer can tell the girls apart by facial features, hair color or body mass, but only if he or she chooses—otherwise, they are indistinguishable from each other.

Upon initial inspection of *Stripper Shoe*, the viewer notices the heels are the focus of the video loop, wherein the performers continuously put on and remove the shoes in infinitely. The shoe being used as form provokes the viewer into wondering what might be

next, and correlates him or her within the role of the customer-as-observer; specifically, by leading the viewer to expect a break from the homogenous monotony, he or she becomes an accomplice to the reinforcement of cultural gender expectations. Whether the viewer silently asks if there might be further action, or judges the probability of the performers losing their balance, or whether they admire the skill it takes to remain standing in the shoes—the piece asks the audience to judge themselves as they are judging the piece, immersing them within a fake situation of an already fake situation of something that is idealized and therefore cannot exist.

These women, false monuments to a false ideal, tower over them in a superficial show of strength—all the while remaining anonymous, and mute. This last point is of particular importance; in the installation, the girls go about their routine silently. They do not speak, nor do they operate under the beat of a song or others speaking. The complete silence draws the viewer's focus to the shoes and the performers' fetishized actions—and no matter what the viewer says, thinks, or does, the performers continue unabated. The performers' silence in the piece is a direct reference to the silence that is demanded of the performers by their regular club clientele; the automatic, hollow and rehearsed performance of both are meant to reflect the expectation that they are not to speak a word of complaint or regard. She just *is*. No objection, no compliment, just action. Through silence, silence is critiqued—and thus the audience is drawn into the contradictory nature of sexualized performance, wherein they *must* acknowledge their part in reinforcing a framework that rewards the reduction of the individual into an object.

While doing research for this piece, I became interested in the performances of Vanessa Beecroft. Her live installations of nude women in gallery or public spaces have served as a major source of inspiration for the formal setup of this piece. Although Beecroft uses her work to comment on fashion and the ideal and I have a more specific social issue I am choosing to highlight, her models stand as if they were just shipped from a factory much like my own. This remains a huge conceptual thread linking her work and *Stripper Shoe*. Sameness is a repeating commonality between her work and mine.

Click to Insert Image, Upload, Apple-S

The fact that the aesthetics and content of Social Networking Sites is so similar is a point of interest for me. Definitive patterns of image, text and even personality based upon user age, race and class can be detected immediately. In discussing the social being and the Web, Pamela McCorduck summarizes Sherry Turkle by saying that “the surface is what matters, to be explored by navigation, not by opening up the hood and peering inside”. She goes on to say “postmodernism celebrates this time, this place; and it celebrates adaptability, contingency, diversity, flexibility, sophistication, and relationships—with the self and with the community”. (McCorduck, *Sex, Lies and Avatars*)

Turkle argues that this idea of an on screen identity gives us the opportunity to have a “new location for our fantasies, both erotic and intellectual. We are using life on computer screens to become comfortable with new ways of thinking about evolution, relationships, sexuality, politics and identity”. (Turkle, *Sex Lies and Avatars*). While I agree with Turkle’s assessment, her optimism about the web’s future has turned out to be groundless, founded on false equivocations between identity and social expectations. Users now have the opportunity to fully explore multiple personas, removed from the contextual pressure of their relevant cultural frameworks; however, when faced with the possibility of the infinite, many users turn to the trite and the expected, reinforcing the old social

constructs that have been built around the male/female gender disjunction. Females tend to turn to the objectification of their own bodies in accordance with the current pop-erotic trends and constructs of the day; males tend to try to display their masculinity by testing their resolve against shock viral videos, participating in some strange modern Web 2.0 version of playing Chicken.

Olia Lialina's article "Vernacular Web 2.0" states something more true to what I have experienced on the web through Social Networking Sites. Lialina asserts that "the online life of today's user is full of diverse attractions, and yet it follows very strict standards. It is disciplined and formalized." (Lialina) This observation was intended to describe how Web 2.0 looks, however, I believe it to be applicable to some of its content as well.

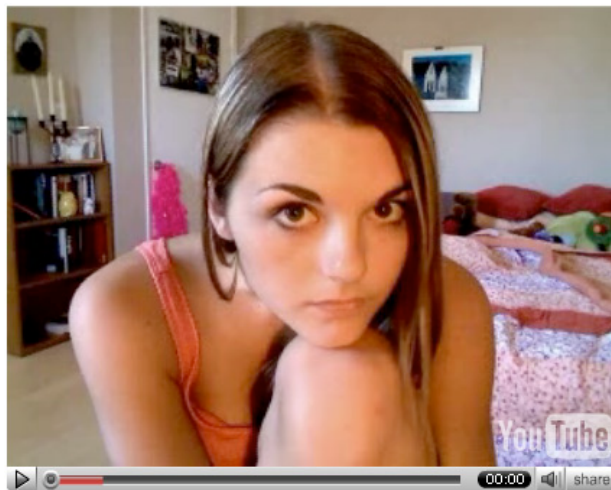


Fig 8

With reference to this idea of disciplined and formalized standard, my immediate reference is lonelygirl15. She was created by Miles Beckett, Mesh Flinders, Greg Goodfried, and Amanda Goodfried. She is an online video blog on YouTube starring Bree,

a non-existent teenage girl created by the group in 2006. On this channel, Bree would discuss a wide variety of subjects ranging from her first kiss, to her overbearing parents or even the extinction of the dinosaurs. It was her personal video diary that millions followed.

Because of this blog, Bree was one of the first major contributors to the idea of the digital culture and self-celebrity phenomenon that still exists today; that is, before everyone realized she is a fictional character. Although fictitious, she still meets a very clear set of standards for girls her age with reference to appearance, blog topics, problems and solutions. This project calls into question what the difference is between performance, reality and access to the personal life of the self. In addition, it asks if these are interchangeable. Most importantly, it asks if its possible to pass collective judgment on what real life is versus virtual life.



Fig 9



Fig 10

Access to the personal life of the self, as one might assume, is a subject widely discussed within web based artist communities, wherein so much the content of social networking deals with the public and the private. Dennis Knopf, the third generation web artist used appropriated booty shaking videos from YouTube to create *BootyClipse*. In this

video, he removed the performers from the footage, so that all the viewer is left with is a portrait of the performers personal space. We notice similarities and differences among the spaces and are encouraged to investigate the personal spaces of ordinary people. Commenting on Web 2.0 social networking popularity, Knopf emphasizes the private living quarters of individuals who participate in the self-celebrity phenomenon, thus forcing the viewer to contemplate who, what where, why of personal access.

YouTube Appropriation Series (working title)

The *YouTube Appropriation Series (working title)* is a body of work consisting of videos appropriated from YouTube. It is linked to *Stripper Shoe* and *Phonejacker* through the common threads of performance, power and access. The work references ideas regarding gender, sexuality, as well as the wide range of personal experience discussed in previous work, all of which conflict, compliment and contradict one another. *YouTube Appropriation Series (working title)* consists of looping video works, namely: *Booty Meat* and *Reaction*.

The two pieces that will be discussed include footage from two extremely popular video phenomenon: the “reaction” video and the “booty dance” video. Each of these serves its purpose and functions within digital youth culture as a major statement of the times that no other generation has had the power to make to this extent: Look at me.

Booty Meat

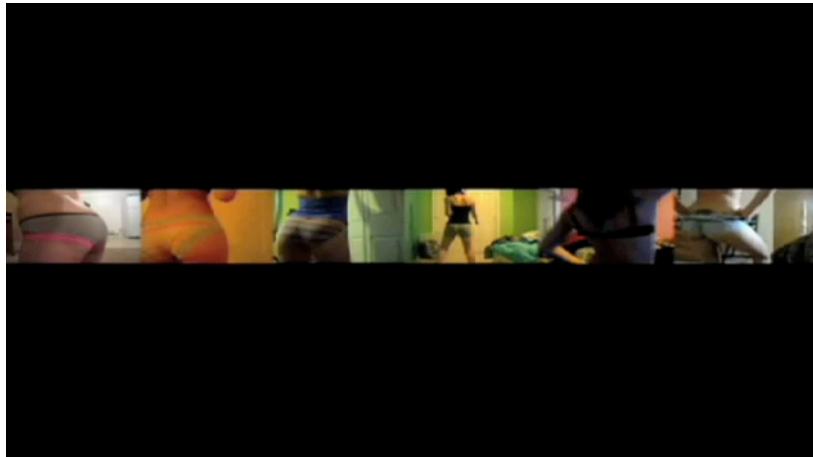


Fig 11

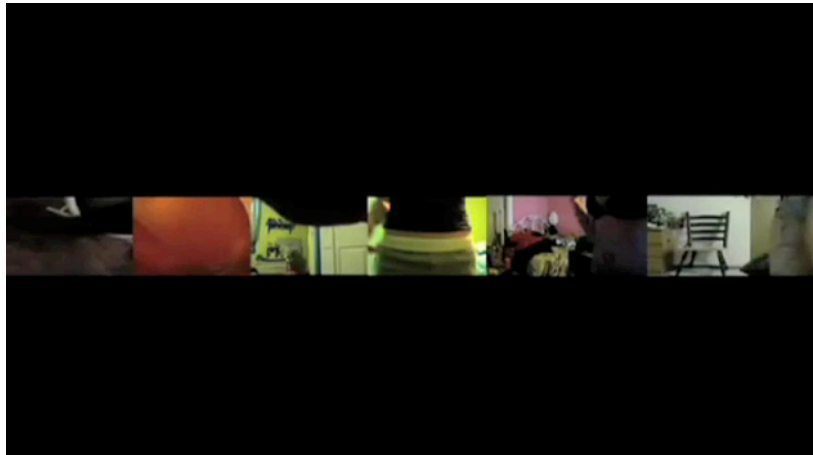


Fig 12

Booty Meat is a two channel video work compiled of appropriated footage, in which, women have recorded themselves performing. They dance in front of a digital, time-based lens to the song of their choice. The vantage point of the shot is usually lower than eye level, from the rear and focusing on the neck to mid-thigh area of the body, again, only including the "important parts" . Typically created in their own home, the women shoot and distribute the footage themselves via their YouTube channel (account). In creating the footage, the dancer functions as the sole camera(wo)man, editor, producer,

distributor, choreographer, makeup artist and wardrobe specialist. She can also be the audience.

The appropriated footage comes as a result of my own fetishization of this type of video phenomenon after accidentally running across it in 2006. Issues regarding the rationalization of the actions of the self through the actions of others with like obsessions immediately surface as a personal motive for the collection and obsession of the footage. The mindset of myself as a maker, observer, and participant in this culture is an integral part of the creation of the piece.

The concept behind the title is exactly what it sounds like. The term “Booty Meat” comes from the title of a song by DeAndre Ramone Way, also known as Soulja Boy Tell ‘Em. It is the sixth song on the artist’s first studio album, released in 2007 (Everyone, Wikipedia). The song is about women with typically “hot asses” (according to the standard set forth by male heteronormative popular culture) who dance well, according to the desires of the spectator, Soulja Boy. He functions also as a stand in for the gaze and those who participate in popular culture.

It must be noted that the idea of “Booty Meat” has existed long before the song. “Booty Meat” has been around, perhaps since the advent of dance itself. Soulja Boy simply gave it a catchy name. Preceding the coining of the expression, terms such as “ass shake”, “booty dance”, and sometimes “stripper dance” can be plugged into any search bar, gaining the similar results as “booty meat”. The results of “Booty Meat” in YouTube’s search bar immediately confront the searcher is mass volume.

Once the videos were collected and compiled, I contemplated the performers individual motives for creating their clip. The male gaze came into immediate focus as the natural assumption for myself and other academic minded people who have had this theory taught to them for years: She is performing for a male. Or perhaps even has a desire for celebrity. The next question begs to be asked: Was I sure? Because of the mass amount of "booty" videos in circulation, the background of the performers, age, race, and social/economic class, it is impossible to settle on a collective motive for action and performance.

Deciding on a motive was never an intended goal. I immediately noted that the motives of the performers in relation to one another are all different, conflicting, and contradictory, much like my own motives for what I do in my personal life. There is a piece of me in each clip and a piece of each clip in me. Some questions I have for the girls performing are the following: Is she doing it for attention? Is she in love with her own image? Is she insecure? Is she an exhibitionist? Is she dancing because she is empowered by it? Is she ashamed of it? Does she do this because she loves it and cant get enough? Does she do this because she hates it, but cant stop? Is she performing for approval? Is she performing because she feels good and doesn't care about approval? Is this making her happy or making her feel objectified? Is this the future of social networking? The answer is yes.

When given the opportunity and voice to be and break free of gender and sexual constructs, why are women feeding into everything that their predecessors fought against? Further, why am I, the self proclaimed feminist and believer in brains before booty, not all

that mad about it? Do I believe that all efforts for women to exist separately from, or perhaps even in harmony with, their sex organs are a futile one? Yes. Do I act as a cheerleader for the embrace of sexual desire despite the aforementioned conviction? Yes.

The emphasis on the start/stop portion of the videos and the fact that they are the only parts I have chosen to show, reveals another layer: the characterization of the performer. The footage presented is not the intended performance, but rather, a glimpse into the moment right before and right after the performance. For those few frames, the viewer gets as close as they will ever get to the real woman choosing to put herself on display. Not much can be taken from those few seconds, since the performance began as soon as the decision was made to hit Record. However, those few seconds do suggest the existence of a real girl, outside of the act.

Reaction

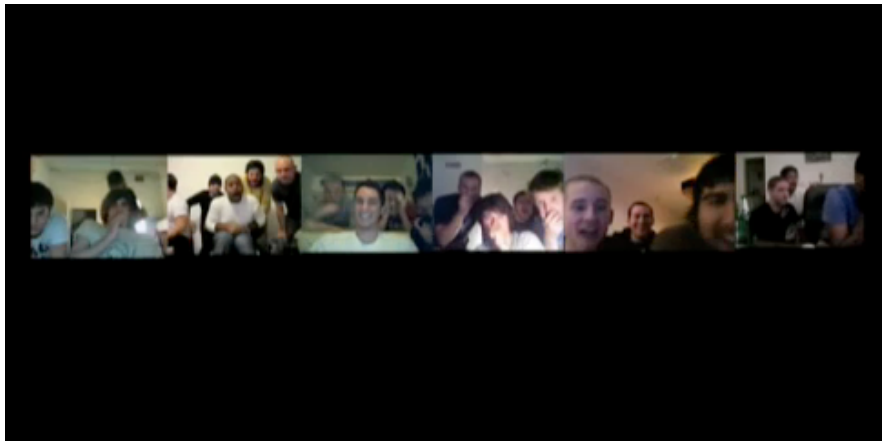


Fig 13

Reaction is a multi channel video work created from appropriated YouTube videos, much like *Booty Meat*. In this particular piece, six different video sequences are laid out on

one channel. Each sequence is a different YouTube reaction video to a popular viral video from a shock-site⁷.

The video sequences contain 3-5 young men ranging in ages from about 16-24. The sequences are timed together so that the reactions videos time up as one meta reaction. The boy's responses range from laughter, curiosity and jest to shock, nausea, and disgust. They are judging that which they have sought out and gained access to. Each set of boys have also hit record on their recording devices and are aware of what they are doing; a performance of the male gaze. They understand that this camera's recording will be distributed in just a matter of time.

YouTube's Terms of Service Agreement does not allow for the site to host videos that are violent or sexual in nature. For many users, this is an undesirable rule because the violent and sexual videos they desire to see must be found elsewhere. However, because of this presumably generational self-celebrity craving (or perhaps, simply self representing; the only way to truly exist in a mediated world of multiple selves), the reaction video has come to be. The source video itself cannot be shown on YouTube, however, people watching it can. The concept of a reaction video is simple. Typically a group of people, often times young boys, seek out a popular viral video from a shock-site, then video record their reactions to viewing said video. This elicits curiosity from the viewer, both about

⁷ A shock-site is defined as a "a website that is intended to be offensive, disgusting or disturbing to its viewers, containing materials of high shock value which is also considered distasteful and crude, and is generally of a pornographic, scatological, extremely violent, extremely profane, or extremely provocative nature.[1] Some shock sites display a single picture, animation, or video clip, or a small gallery, and are often passed around via email or disguised in posts to discussion sites as a hoax in an attempt to trick readers into following the link to the website (a bait and switch). Other shock sites are merely websites that openly display shocking material." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shock_site)

what the performer is watching, and perhaps what their reaction might be if they saw what the performer was seeing.

The viewer's typical initial response to the origin videos of *Reaction*, and arguably the intent of the reaction video itself, is to find humor in the situation because the actions of the boy's are so animated. However upon further inspection and thought, other ideas surface: Why do we watch these shock viral videos? Why do people make them? Is this kind of accessibility going to serve as the next generation's version of pornography as a result of our societies desire for upping the bar and expectations of everything? Exactly whom is on display? Is it the performer that is performing? The person watching, because, after all, the person watching is also being watched? Where is The Gaze situated? Is this the future of Web 2.0 networking sites along with booty dance videos? What is the difference between us as a society viewing violent and exploitative video and the Roman death fights that people would also view? What do we gain from seeing this? Is this a right of passage? Is this a response to boredom? Is this proof of our ability to endure the sight physical harm? Does seeing death confirm our life? Is this a portrait of masculinity?

Log Out

My interest lies in our similarities, not our differences. The investigation of viral video reactions and booty dance videos function as the tip of the iceberg in terms of potential for content within the trends and motives behind popular YouTube video genres. This is also true for Social Software content at large. Nowadays, if we attend an event or witness a special moment in our lives and forget to bring the camera or camcorder, its ok; someone else did and it will be on YouTube, Flickr, Facebook or written about on Twitter in just a short amount of time.

Because of Social Networking Sites, the idea of the living archive has been taken to the next level. In doing so, it has brought into question both the role and its effects. In terms of the role of the archive, the Social Networking Site has created a formula for what the archive should look like. Camera angle, subject matter, volume, and caption are a few examples of the standardized ways in which we share our lives with others.

In terms of the effect of Social Software and User-Generated Content sites, we are now faced with even more cultural obligation than ever before. Do we attend events only to post them online? Why do we feel obligated to prove our social existence? Is it to give us a sense of belonging to a greater community? Simply because we can?

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VITA

Andrea Leigh Nia Burks was born on December 13, 1984 in Hampton, Virginia. She is an American artist who lives and works on the east coast of the United States. As an undergraduate, she received her BFA in Sculpture and Extended media with minors in Art History and Painting and Printmaking at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Va. From there, she attended the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, Maryland, where she received a merit scholarship and completed her MA in Digital Arts.

After graduating from MICA, she returned to Richmond, Virginia for her MFA in Photography and Film at VCU where she received a Full Graduate Teaching Assistantship for the 2007-2008 school year.

Upon graduation, she plans to continue to expand her exhibition record and, more importantly, expand her awareness and knowledge as an artist. Currently, she has exhibited in galleries on the east cost including Richmond, Baltimore, and Brooklyn.