Inland Norway
University of
Applied Sciences

Faculty of Education

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Master´s Thesis

Selfie art, identity construction and agency in ESL learning

Master´s Degree in Culture and Language Didactics

Autumn 2022

Acknowledgements

There are many people who have supported me on this journey and who deserve my deepest gratitude. I would like to thank my supervisors Ida Jahr and Matthew Marlingford Williamson. I especially want to thank Matthew who has patiently guided me through most of this process and given me invaluable advice all the way up to the finishing line. Thank you, Hege, for being a supportive boss. Your generosity has made this journey happen. I also want to thank my lovely mother, May Wenche, for all your help and for being such a wonderful grandmother for my children. Thank you to my children, Agnes Rose and Gabriel, for your hugs and kisses and for lovely creative breaks! Finally, I need to thank my partner, Eivind – your support and encouragement means the world to me!

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Abstract

Social media provides a space where people from around the globe can interact using images and English as the predominant means of communication. The non-physical quality of the Internet allows people to swiftly move between different networks, profiles and to represent their identities in temporary images. This thesis investigates how Instagram selfie artworks by Cindy Sherman and Amalia Ulman can be used in ESL learning to explore how identity is constructed in selfies and what social implications different ways of composing a selfie can have. Sherman´s selfies call attention to stereotypical representations and editing practices in social media discourse. Ulman´s selfie art performance and parafictional hoax raise questions of authenticity and the transactional characteristics that selfies can have. These issues are significant for the overarching aim for this thesis which is to explore how Sherman and Ulman´s selfie art can be used to critically approach identity construction and agency. A multifaceted methodological approach has been used in this investigation. Critical Discourse Studies has been used to look at social media discourse and to critically evaluate selfie practices, multimodal discourse analysis has been applied to analyse the selfies as both image and text, selfie genres have been used to look at different classifications of selfies, and Discursive Agency Approach has been used to consider the roles of agency and choice within social media discourse. The investigation has concluded that visual literacy skills are principal for being able to read selfies beyond surface level and to detect the underlying implications. Also, the investigation demonstrates how pupils need to be made aware of the significance of their choices and what options are available in order to approach identity construction and agency with a reflective and critical mindset. The proposed didactic tools for exploring the selfie artworks are using visual literacy tools and selfie genres, where the aim for these didactic implementations is to foster critical thinking skills, a creative and open mindset, and to create an understanding of how and why selfies are composed the way they are.

Norsk sammendrag

Sosiale medier tilbyr et rom hvor mennesker fra hele verden kan omgås ved bruk av bilder og engelsk som rådende kommunikasjonsform. De ikke-fysiske egenskapene ved Internet gir folk mulighet til å bevege seg hastig mellom forskjellige nettverk og profiler og til å representere sine identiteter i bilder. Denne oppgaven utforsker hvordan Instagram selfie kunst av Cindy Sherman og Amalia Ulman kan bli brukt i Engelsk undervisning for å se på hvordan identitet kommer til uttrykk i selfier og hvilke sosiale implikasjoner forskjellige måter å forme en selfie på kan ha. Shermans selfier viser til stereotypiske uttrykk og måter å redigere bilder på i sosiale medier. Ulmans selfie kunst performance og parafiksjon stiller spørsmål ved det autentiske ved selfier og hvordan de kan forløpe som en transaksjon. Disse temaene er viktige for det overordnede målet for oppgaven som er å utforske hvordan Sherman og Ulmans selfie kunst kan bli brukt for å kritisk tilnærme seg identitet på nett, og hvilken rolle handlingskraft har i selfie diskursen. En mangefasettert metodologisk tilnærming er brukt i oppgaven. Kritisk diskursanalyse er brukt for å se på sosiale medier og praksiser rundt selfier, diskursanalyse av selfier som bestående av sammensatt tekst er brukt til å analysere egenskaper ved selfiene, selfie sjangre er brukt til å se på forskjellige klassifiseringer av selfier og ´discursive agency approach´ er brukt til å vurdere mulige handlingsrom og valgmuligheter for brukere av sosiale medier. Denne undersøkelsen konkluderer med at visuell tekstkyndighet er vesentlig for å kunne lese selfiene på et dypt nivå og for å kunne oppdage de underliggende implikasjonene. I tillegg gjør undersøkelsen det klart at elever trenger å bli bevisst sine valg og hvilke valgmuligheter de har for å kunne tilnærme seg representasjon av sin egen identitet på en kritisk og gjennomtenkt måte. De foreslåtte didaktiske metodene for å utforske selfie kunsten er visuelle verktøy og selfie sjangre, hvor målet for arbeidet er å fostre kritisk og kreativ tenkning og å skape en forståelse av hvordan og hvorfor selfier er satt sammen slik de er.

1. Introduction

Social media offers unprecedented possibilities for global communication, where the predominant means of communication are through images and the English language. Norwegian youth spend hours navigating social media sites every day (Staksrud & Ólafsson, 2019, p. 20), using their online identities to interact with and become influenced by other peoples´ visual representations. Identities are being constructed and communicated across borders and influenced by content creators worldwide. National belonging has given way to global belonging. Identity is less about how it is formed, and more about what it becomes. Internet is the web of possible connections and possible identities. What identity becomes relies on how it is constructed within a given position in a social network. The concepts of identity, authenticity and truth have gone from being stable and predictable essences to rebellious ragamuffins who have taken to the streets and stay there. The selfie encloses all these matters. It is a combination of image and language representing the face, the dream, the construction, and idea of the person behind it. Without the skills to read it, it can be everything and nothing.

With a focus on identity, this thesis investigates how these issues can be addressed in ESL learning using Instagram art by Cindy Sherman and Amalia Ulman. Both artists address how identity is being constructed through selfies, though in different ways. As an already world-known artist who made success using her own body to portray stereotypes found in media, Sherman took to Instagram and used the selfie genre to create parodic depictions of self-enhancing practices and social media stereotypes. With a fascination for the ´other side´ of ruling standards of beauty, her selfies have been labelled "Ugly Beauty" by the New York Times (Sehgal, 2018). Ulman is best known for using Instagram to create a performance of selfies telling the story of a fictional persona. The performance served as a critical commentary on selfie practices involving beauty, money, and lifestyle. It was also a demonstration against the stereotype of a young woman in the art community. Her performance falls under the category of parafiction, which is a genre where fiction is presented as fact and aims to hoax an audience into a more critical outlook. The performance brings up questions of fiction and truth, and what the concept of authenticity

means in social media. Both artists apply visual and linguistic resources typically used in selfie practices to comment on the discourse which they are a part of and exemplify how subject positions within a discourse can be reinvented by producing new selfie statements.

This thesis introduces visual literacy in ESL learning as a skillset needed to read a selection of selfie artworks by Sherman and Ulman, and as a skill necessary to navigate critically in social media. Visual literacy is needed to "construct meaning from visual images" (Bamford, 2003, p. 1) and to read and write selfies from a critical and informed perspective. Pupils are continuously subjected to a massive amount of visual information in a contemporary and visually saturated society. Being able to separate necessary and meaningful images from those which are not, is no easy task. As with reading and making sense of literary texts, pupils need the skillset to do the same with images. Visual literacy skills mean being able to interpret and create meaning from images by looking at the combination of visual syntax and semantics in an image. Semantics includes how selfies relate to and gain meaning from the context of Instagram and the way they are placed and used in social media communication, whereas syntax is concerned with the ´building blocks´ of the image. In selfies, digital editing resources are regularly used as a building blocks. Being able to use semantics and syntax in a conscious way allows pupils to look beyond surface level and detect the deeper implications of an image and evaluate their effects on identity construction in social media.

This background for this thesis was a wish to bring English teaching into a space where the use and development of English language skills can feel relevant for the pupils, and to combine this with new ways of seeing, reading, and talking about the space. Sherman and Ulman´s selfie artworks have been selected because they are rich in meaning and use of visual and linguistic resources. They are thought-provoking and fascinating examples of how selfie genres can be used in unconventional ways and to critically comment on the discourse they are a part of. These are qualities that can make them suitable for didactic use. Thus, the overarching research question of my thesis is, *How can implementing Instagram selfie art by Cindy Sherman and Amalia Ulman in ESL learning be used to critically approach identity construction and agency?* To answer this question the concept of identity needed to be investigated further to get an understanding of what identity is and how it manifests in on

and offline worlds. Thus, a sub-question of this investigation is formulated as, *What is the identity and how has it changed with online communication?* Instagram presents their users with endless possibilities for constructing their identities through selfies. Yet, many choose to represent themselves in a stereotypical way. For this reason, the concept of agency has been included in the overall research question. It is a concept that relates to making informed and active choices as opposed to choices which are stereotypical and primarily influenced by mainstream media. Agency involves an awareness of underlying implications in different selfie genres, a knowledge of different ways to compose selfies and an understanding of the significance of choices. Thus, another sub-question in this investigation is, *What is agency and how can it be used in identity construction?* The Ministry of Education and Research formulates the curriculum for education and training in Norwegian schools and provides aims for what pupils should learn. How the aims address identity and visual literacy have didactic significance and are also prioritized in this investigation. Thus, the final sub-question is, *How is visual literacy and identity addressed in the Norwegian curriculum?* The overall research question and these three sub-questions provide the overall direction of this investigation.

The outline of this thesis is structured around the following main chapters: Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework where the chosen theoretical perspectives are focused on Instagram, Parafiction, visual literacy and identity. These considerations specify the sub-sections of the chapter. Chapter 3 presents the methodological approach of the thesis. This is a qualitative research project applying a multifaceted methodological approach which include Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), multimodal discourse analysis in combination with a classification of selfie genres as outlined by Eagar and Dann (2016), and the Discursive Agency Approach (DDA). The multifaceted approach has been chosen due to the complex nature of this investigation which involves social media discourse, multimodal text, selfie genres, identity, and agency in online communication. Chapter 4 presents an analysis and discussion of the Instagram selfie artworks. Chapter 5 takes the results and theory into the classroom and presents a discussion on why and how the selfie art can be implemented in ESL learning. The first section of this chapter discusses how identity, critical thinking and visual literacy are presented in the Norwegian curriculum. Section two discusses how identity construction and agency are made visible in Sherman and Ulman´s selfie art and

choices, and their classroom potential. The third section provides activities and practical suggestions for classroom implementations, where visual literacy exercises and work with selfie genres take the didactic front seat. The final section of this chapter explores the possibilities of accessing and using agency in identity construction. Finally, Chapter 6 presents the conclusion of the thesis.

This thesis argues that implementing Instagram selfie art by Cindy Sherman and Amalia Ulman in ESL learning provides pupils with important perspectives on authenticity and the fleeting nature of identity construction, while at the same time prompts critical perspectives on stereotypical depictions and selfie practices in an English-speaking and global social media discourse. Further, it argues that the Norwegian curriculum needs to include non-essentialist perspectives on identity and acknowledge the role of online communication in shaping identities. This thesis also argues that visual literacy skills need to be recognized in a world that is dominated by images and considered important to be able to read and write images with a reflective, open, creative, and critical outlook. Being able to do so can also influence the choices that are being made and how identities are being constructed.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of this thesis, which focuses on Instagram, selfies, parafiction, visual literacy and identity. Section 2.1 explores the possibilities and restrictions of Instagram as a platform for communication, art, and selfie practices. Instagram provides a democratic space for artists to share their art, audiences to experience art and to interact with one another, while it also restricts through regulations, format, and algorithms. The selfie as a multimodal text and practice is explored as one of the main means of communication on Instagram. Selfies as a social practice is investigated in relation to use of linguistic and visual resources such as editing tools, and by looking at the implications of these. Parafiction is explored as a genre that incorporates the ambiguous division between fiction and truth and authentic and inauthentic expressions. In section 2.3, Visual literacy is introduced and investigated as a key component to critically approach identity construction in selfies online. In a society which speaks through images, being visually literate is vital and a training in these skills needs to be implemented in the education system. The section on visual literacy draws on the "The Visual Literacy White Paper" (2003) by Professor Anne Bamford who has worked as an educator in visual studies and is well-known for her research on education. The last section, section 2.4, investigates the concept of identity as it was and has become. This thesis adopts a non-essentialist approach to the study of identity on Instagram, drawing on the work of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Odd Are Berkaak´s "Om ´norske nerk´ og ´virtuelle selv´" (1996). Identity construction online is removed from an essentialist idea on national identity, as the Internet provides a space for exploring multiple identities and cultures. These perspectives are investigated in relation to identity construction online, what essentialist ideas are made visible in stereotypical representations and how nationalist ideas in Norway can linger.

2.1   Instagram

Instagram has been and continues to be the number one social media platform for photo sharing. It was launched in 2010 and was hugely successful due to its combination of photo

sharing possibilities, built-in filters, and square frames reminiscent of old ´polaroid´ pictures. Instagram is best "understood as a conduit for communication" (Leaver et al., 2020, p. 1), which provides for a social experience where personal profiles and communities are linked together in a weblike system through hashtags. Instagram users choose how to present themselves, what users to follow, what images to comment on, and what to share their ´likes´ with. Identity is a flexible term on Instagram. No authentic names are required, and you can open as many accounts as you like. Instagram prompts to ´Share a Different Side of Yourself´ (2020, p. 16), by establishing multiple accounts for different purposes and interests. These possibilities have made it a global stage for "a multiplicity of voices, perspectives and performances by individuals and groups" (2020, p. 17), such as musicians, fitness enthusiasts, poets, activists, Influencers, and food lovers, to name a few. Artists utilize the possibilities of Instagram for launching careers, marketing their work and as a canvas and stage to create and perform art (MacDowall & Budge, 2022, p. 113).

Commercial interests have infused Instagram since it opened for advertisement in 2015. When Facebook bought Instagram along with its user data in 2012, an extensive surveillance system emerged. The same user conditions were applied for Facebook and Instagram, so when advertising was launched, tailing users´ traces on Instagram came with great commercial benefits (Leaver et al., 2020, p. 13). The combination of advertisements with this system has established "a new form of capitalism" (Hjorth & Goggin, 2020, p. 310) known as ´surveillance capitalism´ (2020, p. 309). Although the possibility of sharing different sides of oneself comes with exciting possibilities, navigating multiple accounts also means spending more time on the platform and being exposed to more advertising (Leaver et al., 2020, p. 17). Instagram has thus been termed "Janus faced" (Hjorth & Goggin, 2020, p. 309). On one hand, it provides incredible possibilities, and on the other it has an unparalleled potential for surveillance (2020, p. 309) and creating personalised advertisements.

Instagram provides the possibility for users to go from unknown to Internet celebrities, where some make a full-time career on their visibility and content production. Whereas there traditionally has been a clear separation between producers and consumers (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2017, p. 582), on social media the users are both producers and consumers at the same time. The line between amateur content and semi-professional

content is blurred, and users can quickly go from being amateurs to professionals (Kozinets, 2020, p. 143). Such is the example of Influencers. Influencers are Internet celebrities who make content for themselves and their audience and accumulate a following by using social media strategically (Leaver et al., 2020, p. 106). They front brands from different industries such as fashion, food, travel, and beauty and use their established position to "impact their followers purchasing decisions" (Day, 2021). It has taken time for Influencers to be taken seriously within certain industries, such as the fashion industry. However, there are voices who declare that Influencers are redefining what the business of fashion looks like and that they shorten the distances between high fashion and ordinary people (Amoruso, 2019). Thus, with social media platforms such as Instagram, power structures have been altered with the shift of producers on one side and consumers on the other. As with the example of Influencers, power has become accessible for anyone who has the skill set to use the resources that Instagram offers strategically.

2.1.1 Selfies

Selfies are multimodal texts which compromise an ample amount of the 100 million photos that Instagrammers share every day worldwide. It earned the title ´word of the year´ by *The Oxford English Dictionary* in 2013 (Killingsworth, 2013) and is considered a "personal media genre" (Veum & Undrum, 2018, p. 87). The selfie is both photograph and "a practice demonstrating multiple meanings, interpretations, and relationships between creator and audience" (Leaver et al., 2020, p. 66). Primarily, the selfie is taken by the person holding the camera, often using a smartphone front-facing camera. It has also come to include photos of an individual taken by someone else, as well as objects and surroundings leaving out the body, or in combination with the body (2020, p. 67). The ´mirror selfie´, where a person takes a picture of themselves in a mirror, is an example of this. Captions and hashtags provide the linguistic resources of the selfie. When an image is uploaded, the user is allowed to make captions associated with the image. The caption can take place as a short text and/or as a series of hashtags, where the hashtags often are placed in a random order without whitespaces or punctuations (Veum & Undrum, 2018, p. 96). According to a study conducted by Veum and Undrum (2018), "signs of linguistic globalization are manifested in the selfie captions through the extensive and creative use of English" (p. 99). Thus, the selfie

is a global practice meant to communicate beyond the borders of one´s own country and makes use of English as a lingua franca to do so. The textual resources constitute an important part of the selfie communication (2018, p. 96) and add to the overall meaning of the image as a multimodal text.

Digital editing tools and filters are commonly used on selfies. Instagram offers a variety of filters to choose from and smartphones have default filters which provide options on how to construct and design a selfie. These filters make it possible to edit and touch up images without artistic and technical skills and thus give "amateur photographers the power of tools once the purview of professionals" (MacDowall & Budge, 2021, p. 2). Whereas some filters are used for compositional purposes, such as adjusting the hue, saturation, and brightness (Zhao & Zappavigna, 2018, p. 674), others are used for manipulating the physical appearance of the person in the selfie. Facetune is external selfie modifier app known to ´beautify´ selfies. It advertises itself as "A one-stop shop for self-expression, creating content and sharing your story" (facetuneapp, 2022), which includes editing tools for whitening teeth, skin, and eyes, smoothing out wrinkles, amplifying certain features such as eyes and lips, and reshaping the body. According to the app´s website it has been downloaded over 200 million times (facetuneapp, 2022). The common use of filters can be seen as an acceptance of making selfies more aesthetically pleasing through manipulation (Leaver et al., 2020, p. 52), and studied in relation to what trending aesthetics signify. Rettberg (2014) proposes ´filter´ as an analytical term, which "allows us to understand how certain aspects of our self-expression are removed or filtered out, and how our self-expression may be altered as we use different technologies" (p. 3). As the filters focus on enhancing and changing the same features according to a standard of beauty, it can be argued that there is a pattern in how to self-express and that many selfie-takers end up looking similar. Thus, the use of filters to manipulate the body has brought up questions related to what an ´authentic´ selfie is. According to Zhao & Zappavigna (2018), filters used for accommodating certain beauty ideals take the selfies from being a "construction of an authentic self to the design of an augmented self" (p. 678). The use of filters and the question of authenticity is a complex issue. On one hand it is authentic as one singular person´s expression, and at the other the person has been filtered to look more generic since the filters adjust the person´s appearance closer to a standard. Thus, the act of pointing the camera and shooting a photo

of oneself is not without its controversies. It is a multi-layered practice that brings up questions of identity construction and authenticity.

Taking a selfie is a multifaceted practice founded in history and culture. In *Selfies : Why we love (and hate) them* (2018), Tiidenberg claims that selfies are merged and informed by "histories of self-representation, photography and the internet" (p. 132), where "each of these three has a long and complicated history of its own – filled with power struggles, norms and cultural imaginaries" (p. 132 – 133). Thus, to read the selfies involves taking all these aspects into consideration and to critically reflect on how they influence selfie production and consumption. This involves looking at social roles and how they are made visible in contemporary selfie practices through the use of visual resources such as filters, camera angles, point of view, background and postures, and linguistic resources such as captions and hashtags. The critical reflection should also extend to how and why selfies are perceived a certain way. Women are subjected to shame and ridicule for sharing selfies that are perceived as sexy, which according to Rettberg (2014), are "mechanisms that society uses to discipline the stereotypical selfie-takers: young women" (p. 17). Men can get away with sexy selfies as ´boys being boys´ but are nevertheless generally perceived best when demonstrating confidence and masculinity in their selfies (Tiidenberg, 2018, p. 97). How social roles are represented and responded to should be investigated in relation to history and culture as influences on how identity is constructed online.

2.1.2 Instagram as a space for art

Instagram represents a new era in art and visual culture for artists and audiences alike. Its characteristics as an online community without time and place-constraints makes the possibilities for artists and audiences seemingly unlimited. In *Art After Instagram* (2021), MacDowall and Budge explores the effects of Instagram as a platform for artists and audiences. According to them, Instagram "shifts the spaces, scale, speed and terms of visual culture and, with it, art, its creators, audiences and space" (p. 150). Artists and audiences are not dependent on locations such as galleries to view and exhibit art. This comes with many benefits. Audiences have the possibility of encountering art and artists which could be

unlikely IRL (´in real life´) (p. 150) and can do it free of charge. Artists do not have to pass through the eye of the needle in gallery selections which grants them a great amount of freedom and the possibility to immediately "take the works and their messages out into the streets" (Hjort & Goggin, 2020, p., 97). Emerging artists have been able to build careers and make a living using Instagram as their showroom (MacDowall & Budge, 2021, p. 127). Established artists also make use of Instagram as a platform of "global relevance" (2021, p. 9). As the influence and extend of Instagram has increased, "it has become less common to find artists, emerging or established, without accounts" (2021, p. 119). Online, both artists and audiences are unrestricted by societal roles and ideological restrictions of the physical world of art and are thus provided with a democratic space (2021, p. 136) for producing and consuming all kinds of art. These possibilities give rise to a new type of agency for artists and audiences. Instagram is an opportunity to immediately share art for those who want to and present it to an audience who have agency to expose themselves to artworks of their choice and to communicate their ideas and thoughts with the artists and other audience members (2021, p. 41, 137). Whereas institutional spaces traditionally have set the aesthetic standards, artists and audiences have agency in determining what these should look like (2021, p. 109).

Instagram´s regulations and options for layouts and fonts restrict how an artist can display images and text, while they also promote Instagram as a democratic space. Artists need to confine to format limitations such as style and size of font and what dimensions the pictures they post can have (2021, p. 127). As MacDowall and Budge (2021) point out, the sameness of display features can make it difficult to stand out and get the attention of an audience (p. 127). Also, how artists´ works are accessed is largely at the mercy of Instagram´s creators who organize and regulate the algorithms of content. This implies that unless a lot of users search for a specific (often already established artist) and/or an account amasses a great deal of followers, it can get lost in the vast ecosystem of Instagram. The limitation of format nonetheless provides a "democratic mechanism for the display of images" (2021, p. 127), which means that on Instagram the same format applies regardless of an artist´s status and rank. The format can also elicit new types of art genres to emerge as artists "work within and across" (2021, p. 115) these constraints. Genres which have occurred within social media can be used to create art and to comment on the discourse which it belongs to. As

such the art selfie has become a means of expression for artists that, instead of being restricted by Instagram regulations, have made use of them.

2.2   Parafiction

This thesis also scrutinises the role of authenticity and the ambiguousness between fiction and truth on Instagram. Parafiction is a genre that encompasses these issues. Fake news, the possibilities of creating several user accounts and fabricated content in social media have blurred the lines between truth and fiction and given rise to the concept of post-truth and the genre of parafiction. Parafiction interrelates with what has been defined as a post-truth era, a term established in the wake of fake news, where truth seems to more of a malleable concept than a stable substance. In 2016, ´post-truth´ was named word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries due to its spiking frequency of use "in the context of the Brexit referendum in the UK and the presidential election in the US" (Word of the year 2016, n.d.). It is defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Word of the year 2016, n.d.). According to OxfordLanguages, post-truth extends the concept of ´truthiness´ which is defined as "the quality of seeming or felt to be true, even if not necessarily true", which reflects "a general characteristics of our age" (Word of the year 2016, n.d.). Overall dichotomies such as fiction/truth and online/offline worlds seem to have lost their idealistic values and collapsed into an experienced ´whole´. To separate what information to have faith in or not, comes down to the critical skillset one approaches visual and linguistic media with. To this end and in an image-saturated society, visual literacy skills are important. In addition, the experience of parafiction can provide insights which can help to critically separate what to believe in or not.

Parafiction is a genre which presents "fictions experienced as fact" (Lambert-Beatty, 2009, p. 54). The term was introduced by Carrie Lambert-Beatty in her text "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausability" (2009). Its main attention is given to performances where "real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived" (2009,

p. 65, 54). Artists who create parafictions engage in online and societal issues related to communication, knowledge, reasoning and understanding (2009, p. 79). The Yes Men group´s World Trade Organization hoax is a famous example of a parafictional performance. The group, which members are an experimental fiction writer, a computer programmer, and new-media artist, created a fake website mimicking the one the World Trade Organization has. The hoax website included a presentation of the members of The Yes Men as representatives working for the WTO and their contact information. Their hoax brought them to important WTO conferences as impersonated WTO representatives, where they managed to put damaging aspects of global free trade on the map. It took several stunts and provocative speeches where the last one included the dissolution of WTO, before the hoax finally was revealed (The Yes Men, n.d.). In the overwhelming stream of information being consumed, a parafictional experience such as this can make you stop, think, and second-guess what is being shown to you. The consequence of being a part of an audience who is fooled into believing in a story or persona only to be robbed of that belief, is a more critical outlook on media and how one interacts with it (Lambert-Beatty, 2009, p. 82). These parafictional experiences can "prepare us to be better, more critical information consumers (…) [and] train us in scepticism and doubt, but also, oddly, in belief" (2009, p. 78). It is easier to believe in something when critical skills are developed, and we are trained in seeing something for what it is. This is especially important for young people who are children of the post-truth era and frequently consuming and producing content on social media.

2.3   Visual Literacy

In a world saturated with visual information and communication there is a demanding need for visual literacy skills. A person with these skills has a critical and reflective approach to the image flow online and can produce images with the same mindset. It concerns "what is seen with the eye and what is "seen" with the mind (Bamford, 2003, p. 1). Visual literacy is defined as the "ability to construct meaning from visual images" (Bamford, 2003, p. 1) and to "recognize and understand ideas conveyed through (…) images" ("visual literacy", n.d.). The term was first used in 1968 by the writer John Debes (Bamford, 2003, p. 1). Since then, the

purpose of and need for visual literacy has changed with the rapid development of technology where visual online networks have taken centre-stage in present-day communication (Kedra, 2018, p. 70). Professor Anne Bamford OBE is considered a "global innovator in education" (Professor Anne Bamford, n.d.) and explains visual literacy skills, how to work with visual literacy skills and why in the paper "The Visual Literacy White Paper" (Bamford, 2003). This is an educational paper which explains what literacy skills are, how to use them and why they are needed. She underscores that, although some visual literacy skills are being acquired automatically, pupils need to be taught visual literacy skills to be able use their "higher order visual literacy skills" (2003, p. 5). An educated visual literate mind can make them "more resistant to manipulation by visual means" (2003, p. 5), distinguish between necessary and unnecessary messages (2003, p. 4), and be able to create meaningful visual communications (2003, p. 1). Visual literacy skills are needed to read and interpret the meaning of selfies which compromise a considerable amount of visual communication online. As has been previously mentioned, the selfie is subjected to digital manipulation, ideological representation and stereotyping which means that a visual literate approach to interpret its meaning is necessary.

2.3.1 Reading and writing images

A literate person can both read and write visual language. Reading images involves decoding and interpreting an image, whereas writing images involves encoding and composing (Bamford, 2003, p. 1). An understanding of visual semantics and syntax is needed to be successful in both respects, and for images can to read in an informed and literate way. Visual semantics refers to the meaning of images in a communication process. Meaning is created through "form and structure, culturally constructed ideas that shape the interpretation of icons, symbols and representations" and "a social interaction with the images" (2003, p. 4). When working with pupils, visual semantics can be developed by posing thoughtful and challenging questions (2003, p. 5) which address the creator of the image, the context and history, why the image was created, intended audience, where the image is shared, whether the image has been altered, and what it says about our history, identity, society, and culture (2003, p. 4). Visual syntax provides the structure or "building

blocks" (2003, p. 3) that organize an image. These building blocks are visual resources and include camera angles, point of view, editing and picture manipulation. Other examples include colour, juxtaposition of images, perspective, line, shape, balance, tone, contrast, emphasis, symbolism, layering, illumination, foreground, background, and visual/text relationship (2003, P. 3). Understanding how semantics and syntax work separately is needed in both the reading and writing process, but to consider how they work together in an image is important to see the overall meaning of the image as part of a social practice (2003, p. 4). *Figure 1* shows a set of questions which Bamford has developed to be used to develop visual literacy. The questions take both semantics and syntax into consideration.

Manipulation as visual syntax is important to consider when working with selfies due to its many editing practices. The editing practices seem to be strangely disguised with the idea that if the editing looks natural, it can pass as such. Traditionally, photography has been a medium trusted to replicate reality; a `realist´ medium. For a long time, techniques such as staging, object removal and re-touching have been used to manipulate images but have mainly been done so by those with considerable resources for reasons related to power, for example for propaganda purposes (Swerzenski, 2021, p. 109). The idea of photography being a `realist´ medium remains in contemporary photo practices where the typical photo is considered "an accurate representation of reality" (2021, p. 108). Although digital editing tools are commonly used on images, their cutting-edge technology makes manipulation hard to expose and recognise. It also seems, although users are aware that manipulation is taking place, even expecting it (2021, p. 114), a traditional trust in the photo medium strangely seem to remain intact. This might also be due to a post-truth "defeatist attitude" (2021, p. 114) in online media where there is no easy way of checking what is manipulated or not. Swerzenski´s question is thus fitting, "What are we supposed to believe when nothing seems fully credible anymore?" (p. 114) Nonetheless, "[m]any critical media literacy scholars dismiss this defeatist attitude by pushing towards a closer examination of [visual] texts that don´t fall into a `real´ or `fake´ dichotomy" (2021, p. 114) which is where the need for visual literacy skills come in. Looking at and understanding how an image is manipulated is a skill needed to approach digital visual images and selfies critically.

Pupils can train themselves to spot image manipulation by becoming intimately acquainted with how filters and tools are being used and can be used (2021, p. 118). A technical understanding of tools and filters can make pupils critically approach and discuss issues related to ethics of photo manipulation (2021, p. 118). Experimenting with unconventional uses of tools and filters can give them technical understanding and flip the meaning of the intended use (2021, p. 115). An example of this is `culture jamming´ (2021, p. 115) which is defined as "the practice of criticizing and subverting advertising and consumerism in the mass media, by methods such as producing advertisements parodying those global brands" ("culture jamming", n.d.). When culture jamming, tools and filters can be used to parody and thus question the norm of the usage. Using the tools in different and unexpected ways can clarify what they do to an image. An examination and understanding of how tools can be used provides pupils with a critical approach to digital images and is an important aspect of being visually literate in contemporary society.

Issues	• What issues are being shown in the image?
	• How is the way the issue is shown in the image similar to or different from how you see this issue in the world?
	• What might this image mean to someone who sees it?
	• What is the message of the image
Information	• Where has the information in the image come from?
	• What information has been included and what information has been left out?
	• What proportion of the image could be inaccurate?
	• What information presented is factual/manipulated/framed?
	• What is the relationship between the image and any text?
	• What impact does the size of images within the picture have?
Who	• What people are depicted in the image (even if there are now actual people
	in the image, whose culture or experiences are being shown?
	• Who created the image and for what purpose
	• Who is the intended audience for the image?
	• Whose point of view does the image take?
Persuasion	• Why has a certain media been chosen?
	• Why was a particular image chosen?
	• Why was the image arranged that way?
	• Is the information contained in the image factual?
	• What devices have been used to get the message across to the viewer?
	• How has the message been affected by what has been left out or is not shown?

Assumptions	• What attitudes are assumed?
	• Whose voice is heard?
	• Whose voice is not heard?
	• What experiences or points of view are assumed?

Figure 1 Bamford – visual literacy questions

2.3.2 Why visual literacy matters

A fundamental understanding of how to read images is necessary to keep up with the pace of images being produced in instant and universal communication in contemporary culture (Swerzenski, 2021, p. 105). With a move from textual literacy to visual literacy, there is a growing need for being able to "read images in a meaningful way" (Bamford, 2003, p. 2) and to be equipped with the skills to do so. We are subjected to images which influences our "attitudes, beliefs, values and life-style" (2003, p. 3); issues reflected in identity development and construction. In addition, since what counts as truth and lies in social media is

ambiguous, a deeper look into what is happening within an image is needed to avoid binary approaches in "labelling an image as `true or false´ (…) [which] provide only surface level understanding" (Swerzenski, 2021, p. 105). Thus, education is needed to critically assess this phenomenon, the meaning of images, and the influence they have on our culture and identities.

Despite a growing demand for visual literacy, there is a lack of education and knowledge in schools on this topic (Elkins, 2007, p. 4 – 5). Teachers most frequently use visual images as motivational tools for learning and often express negative attitudes towards media culture, pointing to aspects such as "media violence, advertising and materialism, race and gender stereotyping, or concentration of media ownership" (2007, p. 114). A case study conducted with Norwegian ESL pupils using visual literacy practices showed that learners engaged successfully with themes such as power and identity, and that the ESL classroom provides a suitable setting for exploring issues in global contexts (Brown, 2022, p. 91, 109). Brown expresses a tendency amongst pupils to "read images at a superficial level" (2022, p. 92) which creates a need for scaffolding and a vocabulary for talking about images (2022, p. 92). Brown also points out the overall risk of pupils "passively accepting messages conveyed through the multitude of visual texts" due to a trust in the photograph as a "credible representation of reality" (2022, p. 91). Since social media is an expanding phenomenon there is a need to examine how pupils and educators can be trained in visual literacy. With a lack of training young people who consume visual culture are unable to extract a deeper meaning from visual messages and thoroughly assess the influence images can have on them (Kedra, 2018, p. 70). Education in visual literacy needs to start with the teachers in their schooling (Butler, 2019, p. 1) and provide the tools for teachers to successfully provide the scaffolding and vocabulary needed for pupils to understand the meaning of images and have the skills to critically approach them.

2.4   Identity

The Internet has changed identity from a concept of an essence to be formed, to what identity is, can be and what it becomes. Identity is now constructed rather than formed and

continues to reconstruct itself. With less stress on national identity and cultural inheritance as conditions for personal identity, and the expanding possibilities for identity construction taking place in online communities, contemporary identities seek to "avoid fixation and keep the options open" instead of being "solid and stable" (Gay & Hall, 2011, p. 18). For young people who are born and raised within the Internet era, online and offline worlds are fleeting categories. They communicate with their closest friends through social media, at the same time as they communicate with people they have never met in person. Their identities are communicated and constructed in different communities both off and online simultaneously. As in the ´real world´ they need to relate to social roles and stereotypes in their identity construction. Classifications of people can be seen to persist in ´both worlds´ only through different means. In social media these are primarily expressed visually through images and short texts. This section addresses these issues by investigating non-essentialist perspectives, stereotypes, and online identity, and by addressing the concept of identity.

2.4.1 Non-essentialist perspectives on identity

From a non-essentialist perspective identity is not a stable substance but a discursive construction, always changing and becoming. Identity is regulated by discursive structures and become what these structures make it out to be at a given moment in time (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 23). Identity depends on existing subject positions in the discourse from which to gain meaning. That is, "the speaking subject is depended on the prior existence of discursive positions since discourse constitutes the ´I´ through the process of signification" (2016, p. 648). Key to understanding identity from a non-essentialist perspective is that ´identity´ does not, as with other words in language, have an essence of truth related to their shape or name. For instance, there are no core essences related to the words such as ´truth´, ´identity´, words of gender, and so forth. Rather, these words can be seen as concepts that gain meaning from the context that speaks and practices them (2016, p. 24). This thesis focuses on a combination of images and text as language. These multimodal texts are considered the signifiers which assume meaning from their contexts. More specifically, a selected number of selfies are the signifiers considered in the context of Instagram and social media discourse.

Non-essentialist perspectives are an influence of poststructuralism, where Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault are principal thinkers. Both thinkers oppose structuralist theories of language as an "autonomous, rule-governed system" (2016, p. 22), but give rise to different attentions within poststructuralism.

Derrida´s focus is on the deconstruction of a perception or logic between words and meaning, and how words have no fixed essence of meanings (2016, p. 21, 96). He introduced ´decentering´ as a term (Derrida, 1978, p. 213), where a ´centre´ represents a fixed meaning of words whereas the concept of decentering denies this, insisting there is no fixed meaning outside language (1978, p. 214). What a word signifies is not a "stable signified" (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 21), but a ´signified´ that carries several meanings. Further, his work involves deconstructing binary oppositions and their hierarchical structures implying one as superior over the other, such as man/woman, nature/culture, black/white, speech/writing, reality/appearance and so forth (2016, p. 40). His work relates to identity construction online because of how ideological perceptions can attach to words and classify people. In the same way, images can have essentialist perceptions of what they signify, such as fixed social roles, identity, capital, and intelligence to name a few.

One of Foucault´s main focuses is on language and practice. This involves the concepts of discourse, discursive practices, and discursive formation. Discourse can be defined as the acceptance of utterances or actions in a given context, as natural (Grue, 2021). For Foucault, material objects and social practices are separate from language, but given meaning through discourses and are made visible through language. Discursive formations are based on the language and meaning repeatedly being used in relation to a topic, which culminates in "regulated maps of meaning or ways of speaking" (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 102), and thus being considered as natural. The subject is considered as being governed by discursive power structures. An individual fills discursive positions through statements and can change subject positions with new statements (2016, p. 105). Foucault provides useful insights on how "cultural regulations produce subjects who fit into, constitute and reproduce that order" (2016, p. 105). This can be seen in relation to social media practices on how identity is expressed through selfies, whether these expressions are being reproduced or not, and where that leaves the choice of an individual.

The Foucauldian view on agency is debated. Agency is understood as the capability to choose, act and make a difference within a discourse. Foucault´s position on subjects have been criticised for depriving "the self of any form of agency" (2016, p. 105). However, in his later work he problematizes how people act and think in different ways to the same situation (Foucault, 1988), which introduces an element of choice in his perspective on subjects. Although Foucault regarded the subject as a "discursive construction and the products of power" (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 277) he stated that human beings need to acknowledge free will, and aim to "criticise and destroy" (Foucault, 1988) power-structures that claim to hold truths that are repressive in nature. In a lecture from 1982 he states that he might have "insisted too much on the technology of domination and power", and that he had steadily become more interested in what he terms `technologies of self´ (Foucault, 1982), based on the Greco-Roman philosophy´s principle to `take care of oneself´ (Foucault, 1982). Foucault´s focus on how to take care of and regard the self, reinforces agency. Nevertheless, agency "is not to be confused with a self-originating transcendental subject" (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 632). More so, agency relates to choices which can make a difference within the structures of a discourse. The different subject positions within a discourse provides subjects with choices. As mentioned, individuals´ statement place them in subject positions. Thus, what statement is made, or in the case of social media; how a selfie is composed, makes a difference as to what subject position individuals enter and whether this can make a difference or not. The concepts of discourse and discursive practices, as well as issues of power will be looked at more closely under the introduction of Critical Discourse Studies as a methodological approach, in section 3.1.

The poststructuralist legacy is evident in Odd Are Berkaak´s text "Om ´norsk nerk´ og ´virtuelle selv´" (1996) where he questions essentialist ideas found in Norwegian cultural identity. The text was originally published in *Norsklæraren*, a periodical publication for teachers in the Norwegian subject. It´s title can be translated as "About ´Norwegian strength´ and ´virtual self´". The word ´nerk´ is an old ´Nynorsk´ word which reflects an ideology of Norwegian cultural inheritance. According to Berkaak, an essentialist understanding of national identity is maintained in Norwegian culture. It is based on National Romanticism which preserved ideals of a shared place of origin, a shared cultural repertoire, and a shared and exclusive intimacy with nature, in rich literary imageries (1996,

p. 9). These imageries shape the idea of a certain substance that binds the Norwegian people together and keeps other people out (1996, p. 10). Berkaak claims that this type of national identity is continued, where development and change is considered an extension and refinement of history and of the groundwork that the Norwegian forefathers laid (1996, p. 12). Nonetheless and as Berkaak points out, with globalisation and Internet, non-essentialist perspectives have assumed their positions within the Norwegian society and forced the idea of an essential difference between Norwegians and ´others´ out of the way (1996, p. 12). Berkaak refers to how these forms of communication opens for new types of self-representation and connecting to other people in networks (1996, p. 13). This text was written in 1996 and since then social media and Internet communication have soared. Berkaak suitably predicts the future of internet communications and identity construction online. He refers to how an individual devoid of the limitation of country boarders can visit cultures and connect worldwide with people of similar interests. He also establishes how online networking is fundamentally different to an essentialist idea of national identity, and that many find national pride irrelevant considering this development (1996, p. 13). Berkaak´s text contrasts an essentialist approach to identity with non-essentialist approaches that have developed in the wake of Internet and dominate social media today. This perspective is useful when considering the difference between how young people grow up today in comparison to how it used to be before Internet. His text also provides perspectives on how cultural heritage and traditions can still be embedded in Norwegian culture. Although his text was written 26 years ago, these considerations are useful when investigating how the Norwegian curriculum addresses the concept of identity.

2.4.2 Stereotypes as essentialist constructions

Repeated essentialist beliefs frequently lead to stereotyping and categorizing groups of people both off and online. Categorization is a way to simplify the social world. Individuals are judged based on group membership (Beeghly, 2015, p. 675), typically revolving around issues such as gender, the colour of their skin, ethnicity, social status, and religion (Rhodes & Mandalaywala, 2017, p. 2). The ´degree´ of essentialist beliefs matter, where "stronger essentialist beliefs seem likely to lead to greater willingness to assume that category members will all share the same traits" (2017, p. 12). The ´essence´ found in a group of

people comes down to an expectation that there must be some core characteristics that unites the group, and not a firm understanding of what this is (2017, p. 2). These ideas and expectations are repeated until they become a "probabilistic truth" (Bhabha, 2004, p. 66). The construction and reproduction of stereotypes is found in social media discourses and selfies. Research shows that if a selfie receives a lot of attention, it is imitated, which creates and ensures a reproduction of a stereotype (Döring et al., 2016, p. 956). Stereotypical self-representations seen in personal profiles are simultaneously used in professionally produced media content, such as advertising (2016, p. 956) which can further intensify a stereotype. Stereotypes thus become embedded in the selfie discourse and become a ´discursive strategy´ (Bhabha, 2004, p. 66) where people are regulated by expectations of what they ´ought´ to be like.

Gender stereotypes are examples of stereotypes which follow traditional patterns both off and online. A study conducted on gender stereotypes and Instagram selfies, showed that "Instagram selfies reproduce traditional gender stereotypes and do so even to a larger extent than magazine adverts" (Döring et al., 2016, p. 961). Appearance remains a category deeply rooted in the woman stereotype, where living up to governing standards of beauty can be regarded as a currency (Wolf, 1992, p. 21). In social media, appearance plays a dominant role in how people choose to construct themselves and respond to others. Döring et al. claim gender is acted out in two ways in social media: through gender expressions seen in styling and outfits, and by *creating* gender expressions through "posture, facial expressions or gaze" (2016, p. 955). On Instagram, how to express this perfectly in a selfie is often demonstrated by Instagirls (Butkowski et al., 2020, p. 818). Users such as these frequently create tutorials for young women, focusing on make-up, how to use light, filters and how to pose. Males are also perceived and constructed in stereotypical ways. Bacev-Giles and Haji (2016) conducted a study that demonstrates how gender stereotypes are present in how males and females are perceived and described. Males are often described "in terms of the instrumental trait, athletic, whereas the female target is more often described in terms of the relatively warmer and expressive traits, friendly and creative" (2016, p. 55). Moreover, the selfies with greater gender displays were given the most likes and positive feedback (Butkowski et al., 2020, p. 831). Consequently, the popularity of these

representations encourages other users to imitate and reproduce, which in turn supports a stereotype and the characteristics that are implied in the selfies.

2.4.3 Online Identity

For young people, navigating online networks and communicating online are as important for their identity developments as their offline experiences are. Norwegian youth between 15 and 17 years old spend approximately four and a half hours online every day, where social media networking is a predominant activity in how they spend their time (Staksrud & Ólafsson, 2019, p. 20). What is happening online overlaps into the offline world, and there is no clear distinction between either one. Hongladarom (2011) proposes that since the use of social media and online networking has become widespread, "a fusion" between the online and offline selves is taking place. There is no essence to either the online or offline selves, and both identities are in "relations with other selves as well as other events and objects" (2011, p. 533). When considering identity off and online, it is important to recognize that ´both´ identities belong to the same source, and that online worlds merely represent a means of information and interaction which is an integrated part of everyday communication. Thus, when considering online identity, the "´I think´ that binds up all the various texts and images posted online" (2011, p. 547) needs to be considered as belonging to one and the same self which operates both on and offline.

Online identities are distinguishable from offline identities in that authenticity is an easier bendable concept. Online identities can be considered performative, and authenticity an effect, rather than an essence (Poletti & Rak, 2013, p. 75). When constructing identity online, authenticity can be calculated, which can be compared to how you manage a stage (Smith & Watson, 2013, p. 75). What elements that are ´staged´, or what "signs we use to attribute meanings to ourselves" (Tiidenberg, 2018, p. 23), can be linked to identification. This prompts a view on identity as "the collection of things, people, practices, norms and conventions you identify with" (2018, p. 23). Although elements are staged, they can still be considered as meaningful constructions which reflect a person´s identity. It can also be argued that staging our ´selves´ is something that is done in the physical world as well. Nonetheless, online worlds entail practices and elements that can influence what type of

´authenticity´ a user chooses to show. For many, being noticed and increasing the amount followers can factor in on how they construct their selves. In these cases, online identity construction can be regarded both a process and a product (Poletti & Rak, 2013, p. 10), which can make it difficult to separate truth from fiction, or what is ´authentic´ or not. If the ´authenticity´ of an online persona is manufactured and a self-performance "then credibility, veracity, and sincerity acquire a ´slipperiness´ that can prompt suspicious readings" (2013, p. 75). In these regard, online identity is different from offline identity since what is presented and communicated cannot be verified by the presence of a physical body. For young people who are influenced and influence others with their identity constructions, the need for tools to separate what are meaningful constructions from needless ones, are important. As already explained, visual literacy is one such tool.

2.5   Conclusion

This chapter has provided a theoretical framework to the study of selfie art in ESL learning to critically approach identity construction and agency. Instagram is a platform which provides both opportunities and restrictions regarding identity construction through selfie practices and art. Instagram´s encouragement and capacity to create multiple accounts underscore the fleeting qualities of identity online. With the unlimited stream of information comes the difficult task of what texts to deem necessary and meaningful or not, and how to understand the influence texts have on one´s own identity construction. Selfies can be difficult to read with a critical mind unless you have the skills to do so. They are loaded with information and charged with incentives. A selfie can contain all sorts of interests, from those who use it strategically for making money to those who simply want to share a moment from a dinner with friends. With a mix amateurs and professionals, Influencers and advertisements, it can be hard to tell the difference from what is what. Further, how selfies are composed also needs to be approached with a critical eye and mind. The uses of visual resources and editing tools which can manipulate a selfie with professional looking results, makes it hard to see beyond the illusion and understand what the implications of the uses are. Visual literacy has been introduced as a skillset that can help young people navigate within this field of multiple interests, and to help them understand that the composition of a selfie can have

ideological implications. These implications can be related to identity construction and how social roles and stereotypes make themselves visible in the way a selfie is composed and edited. Parafiction is introduced as a part of the theoretical framework due to its suitability in addressing issues of authenticity online and specifically in selfies. Parafiction is a genre that is used by activists and artists alike where its performances can prompt a critical outlook. When used in selfies, parafiction can make the audience question authenticity and what constructing identities through selfies might imply. A non-essentialist approach is suitable to the investigation of identity on Instagram. Online identities are often without an essence, but are rather constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing themselves in new and different subject positions. Essentialist ideas might nonetheless make themselves in mainstream representations. An awareness of the visual properties and implications of selfies can provide pupils with options to choose from, prompt agency and perhaps help them to compose selfies with a critical outlook, based on what they choose and less on reproductions of trending expressions that might be ideologically charged.

3. Methodology

This is a qualitative research project applying a multifaceted methodological approach which include Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), multimodal discourse analysis in combination with a classification of selfie genres as outlined by Eagar and Dann (2016), and the Discursive Agency Approach (DDA). The multifaceted approach has been chosen due to the complex nature of this investigation which involves social media discourse, the selfie as a multimodal text of both image and caption, classification of selfie genres, the concept of identity and questions of agency in online communication. The analytical approach is applied to four works of Instagram selfie art by Cindy Sherman and Amalia Ulman. From Sherman´s Instagram account, selfies with associated captions and comments were selected based on identity-related themes, and the potential for using the images didactically. From Ulman´s series *Excellences and Perfections* two selfies were selected. The images were retrieved from Rhizome´s social media archiving tool (rhizome.org) and selected based on their potency for representing the depth and range of the series, as well as how they can be used didactically. The first section of this chapter provides an overview of Critical Discourse Studies and examines concepts within CDS that are relevant for this analysis. Section two explains the multimodal discourse analysis, while section three presents the classification of selfie genres. Finally, section four presents the Discursive Agency Approach. By combining these approaches, it becomes possible to investigate the selfies as multimodal texts, to explore their characteristics in relation to selfie genres and to consider subject positions within the selfie discourse in relation to agency. These issues are significant when bringing the selfies into the classroom to explore identity construction and agency.

3.1   Critical Discourse Studies

Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) is used in this thesis to look at factors related to social media discourse, power, ideology, and critique within Instagram and more specifically, within the communicative practice of taking and sharing selfies. CDS has a manifold theoretical background and methodologies. The studies have traditionally focused on textual discourse,

where little attention is given to agency. Nonetheless, key concepts and terms from CDS are central for this study, not only for examining discursive structures, but because a critical perspective can be used didactically when approaching multimodal online text. In the coming sections the key concepts of discourse, power, ideology, and critique are further explored.

The term ´discourse´ is defined from a Discourse Analysis perspective, and with visual text in mind. The term ´discourse´ is founded on a Foucauldian understanding which involves discourse as accepting utterances or actions in a given context, as natural (Grue, 2021). Fairclough and Wodak (1997) define discourse as language which as "a form of ´social practice [which] implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s), which frame it: The discursive event is shaped by them, but also shapes them" (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 6). The interchangeable relationship between a discursive event, a discursive practice dictated by "thoughts, concepts and cultural codes" (Murfin & Ray, 2009 p. 149) and the context is pivotal, and can both support stability and evoke change. On Instagram and in this thesis, language is understood as visual text with associated captions, hashtags, and comments. Discursive practices are thus found and examined within this mode of communication.

A discourse can be analysed by looking at the purposes and effects of a discursive practice, with a critical look at how power structures and ideology influence it. The concept of power is usually perceived in a Foucauldian sense in CDS (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 11). According to Foucault, power needs to be examined as "that which represses" elements such as "nature, the instincts, a class, individuals" (Foucault, 1980, p. 89 – 90). Discourses and society are infiltrated by power relations, which depend on the "the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse" (1980, p. 93). Discursive structures define the codes of what ´normal´ is perceived as (1980, p. 106), which has profound effects on how subjects within a discourse act. Power within social media discourses can be understood as being structured differently than what traditionally has been specified in CDS. According to KhosraviNik and Unger (2016), an online community such as Instagram "breaks away from the traditional linear flow of content from certain (privileged) producers to (ordinary, powerless) consumers" and changes "the distribution processes that were at the

core of assumptions about power in mass media" (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 206). Users of social media change roles "from text consumers to text producers" (2016, p. 213) where the social quality of the production and consummation is breaking down the "traditional dichotomy of powerful/powerless voices" (2016, p. 211). Institutional power *behind* a discourse is thus giving way for social media "power *in* discourse" (2016, p. 211, emphasis in original). Power *in* discourse means the possibility to create changes from within. A recent example that demonstrates this is when Instagram made changes on the platform that many Instagram users rallied against. A post with the text "Make Instagram Instagram again" was shared by millions. The rally was also taken offline with protestors physically showing up at the New York Instagram headquarters, shouting "We need to make the platform work for the people who keep it alive". The criticism was addressed by Instagram head Adam Mosseri, who in a video post on the platform, acknowledged the users´ concerns, attempted to accommodate them, while defending the changes that had been made (Lorenz, 2022). A power structure such as this does not mean there is no power structure. Discussions of power in social media often revolve around capitalist interests and the concurrent production and consummation by online users. Ritzer and Jurgenson gave this interactional and transactional relationship, the term ´prosumers´ - "putting consumers to work" (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 207). Capital interests are represented by platform owners and corporations, who by the use of targeted ads, take advantage of the amount of time a user spends online and the traces of personal information which the users leave behind. Users can take part of a capitalist system and gain from it, but at the same time be unaware of the effects the system has on their choices, behaviour, and identity construction online. The online capitalist model is complex because there is no "absolute control of the recourses" (2016, p. 207). The online structures of power and its effects on the users, both as producers and consumers is an intricate issue that need to be examined further.

Similarly, ideologies are intertwined in discursive structures and can regulate discourses. Ideology revolves around "the binding and justifying ideas of any social group" (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 83). These ideas can be conscious or not, imposed or willingly supported (Murfin & Ray, 2009, p. 235). In their less defined shape, they represent "the hidden and latent in everyday-beliefs, which often appear as disguised conceptual metaphors and analogies" (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 8). Thus, their hidden properties can be imbedded in

discursive practices and in what is considered as ´normal´. Ideas springing from ideology can function as "maps of meaning that sustain powerful social groups" (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 76), remain unchallenged and become "worldviews that constitute ´social cognition´" (2016, p. 9). This is illustrated in how class, race, and gender has been and can be represented (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 640). Ideologies effect not only how groups of people perceive other groups, but how individuals perceive themselves. How groups are represented in discourses can have a ´self-fulfilling prophecies effect´ on subjects within that group and affect their behaviour. Thus, repetitious ideological representations of groups of people can be linked to how stereotypes are formed. In order to unveil ideological issues in selfies, it is important examine the use of compositional resources, how and why they are used and their implications are.

A central aim in CDS is to be critical towards social phenomena to seek out delusions, hidden power structures and encourage understanding and awareness. Change is an important concept in CDS and can be traced back to the origin of the use of the word ´critical´. The use derives from the Frankfurt school and ´Critical Theory´, which aims to use critique as a means to understand and generate change in society (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 7). Rooting out delusions is followed by formulating and producing critical knowledge (2016, p. 7). The subsequent delivery of "critical knowledge (…) enables human beings to emancipate themselves from forms of domination through self-reflection [and] create awareness in agents of their own needs and interests" (2016, p. 7). The word ´critical´ in CDS does not imply a negative attitude or necessarily a focus on "´serious´ social or political experiences or events" (2016, p. 2). It represents a "problem-oriented, interdisciplinary" approach needed and used to interpret and dismantle complex social phenomena (2016, p. 2). What the complexity involves depends on the discourse. For example, how to critically inquire written discourse from the Ministry of Education will be different than critically inquiring multimodal discourse on social media, in part due to the different structures of power. Critical awareness and seeking to unravel delusions are of particular interest for approaching social media selfie discourse didactically. One of the aims in the core curriculum concerns critical thinking and states that "school shall help pupils to be inquisitive and ask questions, develop scientific and critical thinking and act with ethical awareness" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). CDS is thus a suitable analytical approach where the aim is to create a

framework which can be used in ESL learning for approaching issues of identity construction and agency in the selfie discourse. The delusions in a selfie discourse are found in the visual image, the captions and can also be explored in comments accompanying the selfie.

There are also limitations to CDS, with regard to a project which incorporates an investigation on subject positions and agency. CDS has traditionally paid little attention to agency (Leipold & Winkel, 2017, 514). Subjects have been mostly regarded as "social constructions of individuals or collectives (e.g., organizations, nations) that feel, think and act in certain ways" (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 112). In addition, subject positions have been mostly regarded in relation with traditional media where there is "a one-way flow of content from a few elite producers to masses of ordinary recipients". Subject positions in interactive online communities on what has been come to know as ´the participatory web´ (2016, p. 207), differ from those in discourses that do not provide the same possibilities for interacting and communicating. Cindy Sherman and Amalia Ulman´s works can be explored in relation to how their selfie statements lands them in different subject positions and what this means in terms of agency.

3.2   Discursive Agency Approach

The Discursive Agency Analysis (DAA) approach is applied in this thesis due to its attention to agency as a factor when examining subjects in discursive practices. Identity construction is considered in relation to agency due to the dynamic nature of subject positions online, Instagram´s self-governing structure, and Instagram as a platform for artists and audiences to create and experience art unrestrained by gallery selection and location (MacDowall & Budge, 2021, p. 136). DAA is developed by Sina Leipold and Georg Winkel (2017). It is based on and developed from a review of existing interpretive discourse analysis approaches and Leipold and Winkel´s own empirical data (Leipold & Winkel, 2017, p. 510). The approach aims to "facilitate a systematic exploration of agency under a discourse perspective" (2017, p. 510). Their work culminates in a model (2017, p. 510), which integrate the concept of ´trialactic´ agency´. Leipold and Winkel use the label ´analytical heuristic´ for their approach, which means that the rules "are only loosely defined" ("heuristic", n.d.). They favour the

approach "an instruction for a research strategy rather than a new theoretical framework, which makes it more flexible for combining it with various established discourse-analysis approaches" (Leipold & Winkel, 2017, p. 529). A creative use of the research strategy is encouraged by the researchers (2017, p. 527). The heuristic combines well with multi-modal discourse analysis and the examination of the selfie discourse organized in genres (Eagar & Dann, 2016, p. 1838).

Agency in DAA is understood as "trialectically constituted" (Leipold & Winkel, 2017, p. 523) and consists of discourse, agency, and research. Trialectic agency is based on a ´dialectically constituted agency´ which combines agency and discourse, with the addition of the interpretive process of the researcher (2017, p. 518 – 520). The room for agency depends on discursive structures while "at the same time it is the actors who (re)produce and thus do discourses (and shape institutions)" (2017, p. 518). As such, the actors are being "constituted and constituting at the same time" (2017, p. 518). This understanding is termed ´dialectically constituted agency´ (2017, p. 518). The researcher´s own agency compromises the third component of trialectic agency. This perspective prompts a process of interpreting interpretations (2017, p. 520) and underscores "the subjectivity of the researcher" (2017, p. 520). The researcher gives agency and embodies agency through the act of the research and interpretation. Applied in this research, actors in subject positions and their choices within the selfie discourse are being analysed in relation to agency, while the interpretive process and agency of the subjective ´me´ as the researcher, is implied.

Leipold and Winkel´s approach to subject positions and actors´ choices, as well as strategic practices are used to guide the discursive agency analysis. According to Leipold and Winkel, agents "are understood as actors who identify (and are identified) with specific subject positions", and due to the dynamic and changing nature of discourses "adjust new meanings and take up changing subject positions" (2017, p. 524). How subject positions are chosen is essential for understanding an actor´s discursive agency, and "an actor´s ability to make him/herself a relevant agent in a particular discourse by constantly making choices" gives significant information (2017, p. 524). Actors´ force within a discourse is "rooted in their choices to (1) (not) self-identify with an existing subject position in a story line or to invent a new subject position, and (2) "(not) support this position with what they say or do" (2017, p.

524). These descriptions are relevant for artists who choose new subject positions through producing and sharing art, as well as all actors in social media who are constantly faced with choices on how to construct themselves online.

Agents´ choices take place through calculated strategic practices. Leipold and Winkel propose the only way to make choices about subject positions is via strategic practices (2017, p. 525) that are "being dialectically constituted by the (discursive and institutional) opportunity structures on one side and the scope for discursive agency that unfolds in this frame on the other" (2017, p. 525). Instagram as a social media platform provides the discursive opportunity structures, and the scope for discursive agency unfolds within the user community, lay the basis for strategic practices. The practices are ´strategic´ because actors can calculate the outcome of their actions and plan thereafter. The possible strategic practices are linked to agents´ characteristics, such as individual skills and professional positions (2017, p. 524) which are discursively constituted (2017, p. 525). On Instagram, strategic practices can be uncovered by looking at the motivation behind the use of the platform. Whereas some use it strategically to collect followers and make money, others use it to communicate with family and friends. Looking more closely at different selfie genres can also reveal the strategic practices behind the use of selfies. The selfie genres are explained in section 3.4.

3.3   Multimodal discourse analysis

The selfies are analysed using a multimodal analytical approach adapted from a study conducted by Veum and Undrum (2018). Multimodal analysis is applied due to how selfies on Instagram appear as a combination of images and written language. Considering the visual properties of the image in association with the linguistic resources of the captions and hashtags can display a deeper level of meaning than if they are looked at separately. Although the text used with selfies usually is short and consists of separate words in a random order, the words can be loaded with meaning which read into the overall interpretation of the selfie. Using the hashtag #selfie to select a random sample of 100 selfies, Veum and Undrum investigated selfie takers´ representation and interaction, with

corresponding visual and linguistic resources (2018, p. 87). Veum and Undrum emphasise the various semiotic recourses of social media multimodal texts, and present "a critical multimodal discourse analysis of how people make meaning through the semiotic practice of shooting digital self-portraits (selfies), adding captions and then sharing these texts on the social network site Instagram" (2018, p. 87). Their analysis differentiates between visual and linguistic semiotic resources (2018, p. 90). To analyse the meaning potential of the selfies, they use an approach based on Halliday´s theory on the ´three basic metafunctions of language´ and integrate these functions into the analysis with three levels of semiotic meaning: representational, interactional, and compositional (2018, p. 90). These levels are integrated in the analysis in this thesis as well.

The representational meaning is discovered through an analysis of the visual resources used in the personas´ portrayals. Degrees of modality and validity are considered, while keeping in mind the artistic nature of the images and how their meaning can be "considered subjective and lower in modality than science" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 151). Three chief elements are taken into consideration: Firstly, whether the setting is contextualised or decontextualised. That is, if the backgrounds of the selfies are shared with other people or objects or not, if a setting is provided at all and what this consist of. Secondly, visual resources such as editing tools may "affect what social semiotics refer to as visual modality or the ´visual truth´ [of an image, where] [t]he general principle is that the more an image of something resembles how we see it with our own eyes, the higher the degree of naturalistic modality" (Veum & Undrum, 2018, p. 93). Naturalistic modality does not hold all types of truths. Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) use the term ´visual validity´ in place of visual modality, since the term "'validity' has the advantage that it can encompass what seem to be different types of truth that are realized in different semiotic modes" (p. 154). An image might be edited, but the editing may enhance "its validity as an abstract representation" (2021, p. 155), and thus a certain type of truth. Since this thesis analyses artistic photographs which often have lower degrees of naturalistic modality, but can express truths realized through other semiotic modes, the term ´validity´ is used. The third element, narrative, or conceptualised representation is not considered due to the limited scope of this investigation.

In addition to the semiotic resources mentioned in Veum and Undrum´s analysis, colour is considered as a representational meaning. Choices of what colours to use are sometimes regulated (such as in institutions), whereas in art production and interpretation "it will be relatively free" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 244). Kress and van Leeuwen distinguish between two types of affordances for meaning making with colour. First, associations, which can be found in communicative uses of colour and "carry significant symbolic value in the given sociocultural context" (2021, p. 244). Second, the "´distinctive features´ of colour", which have a signifier potential, hereunder: value (grey scale), saturation (from intensely saturated to soft, dull or dark manifestations), purity (from maximum purity to maximum hybridity), modulation (fully modulated to flat), transparency (transparent to opaque), luminosity (radiance), differentiation and hue (the scale from blue to red) (2021, p. 245 – 247).

Interactional meaning is discovered through an analysis of the gaze, point of view and social distance in the image. This interactive dimension of images is a semiotic resource, "based on our embodied knowledge of everyday non-verbal communication" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 115). The ´gaze´ of the represented participant has the function of addressing the viewer as a ´you´ and doing something to the viewer in what is termed an ´image act´ (2021, p. 115). When the represented participant looks directly at the viewer, the "participant demands that the viewer enters into some kind of imaginary relation with him or her" (2021, p. 116). The nature of the gaze and facial expression determines what this relation should be. The absent gaze, where there is no direct contact between the represented participant (the persona), invites the audience in as invisible onlookers. The participant is thus offered to the viewers as an object for the viewers to contemplate on (2021, p. 118). In comparison to the direct gaze that demands, the absent gaze that offers, is less personal. Social distance and point of view are two other dimensions to interactive meaning. With social distance the producer´s choice of distance between the participant and the viewer "realizes different relations" between the two parts (2021, p. 123). The overall categories are related to the size of frame and close-up, medium, and long shot. Finally, the point of view compromises a third dimension to interactive meaning, where the three resources to choose from are high angle, low angle and eye level. Eye level indicates a "symbolic equality and a symmetrical relation between the selfie maker and the viewer" (Veum & Undrum, 2018, p. 95), whereas

low angle can intimidate and demonstrate power, and high angle gives power to the viewer (2018, p. 95). Interactional meaning is central within the act of taking and sharing selfies on social media, since it mere existence is based on interaction between users.

How linguistic semiotic resources are used is considered through ´Lexis´, which compromise captions and hashtags associated with the selfie (2018, p. 91). Captions associated with images are usually limited to single words placed in a seemingly random order (Veum & Undrum, 2018, p. 96). Despite its modest presence, captions can be loaded in meaning; combined with the image they form a multimodal text that communicates a unified message. Comments related to the selfie can also be considered linguistic resources, belonging to the context of the selfie which is Instagram. They constitute a part of the text-based information of the Instagram discourse and can thus contribute to the interpretation and meaning-making of the selfie as a discursive practice.

When considering the compositional meaning of the selfies, the sum of representational, interactional, and linguistic meanings come together as one unified whole (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 179, 182). Underneath is a summary of the different semiotic resources presented in a research model taken from Veum and Undrum´s study, with ´validity´ and colour added to the representational meaning category. As mentioned, narrative/conceptual resources are not analysed. Neither are style and speech acts under linguistic resources, which is also due to the limitations of the scope of this thesis.

Function of meaning	Semiotic resources[2]	
	Visual resources	Linguistic resources
Representational meaning	Contextualized/decontextualized Degree of visual modality/validity Narrative/conceptual Colour	Lexis
Interactional meaning	Social distance • ·Personal (close up) • · Social (medium shot) • ·Impersonal (long shot)	Style Communicative act (speech act)

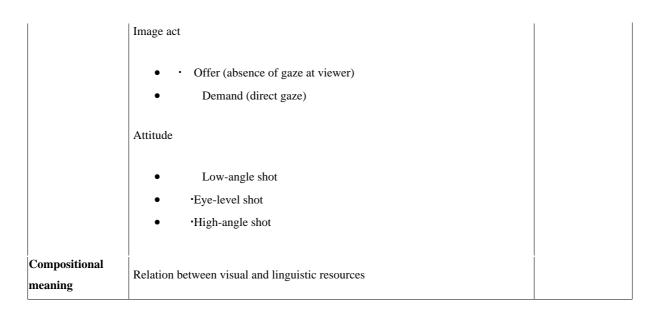|		
	Image act • · Offer (absence of gaze at viewer) • Demand (direct gaze) Attitude • Low-angle shot • ·Eye-level shot • ·High-angle shot	
Compositional meaning	Relation between visual and linguistic resources	

Figure 2 Model of Multimodal discourse analysis

The described approach is used with a specific focus on the artistic dimension of the selfies. Attention is given towards representation of ´truth´ or reality realized by low naturalistic modality, and with a diverse mix and use of validity markers (Kress & Leeuwen, 2021, p. 166). Kress and Leeuwen underline that for the artist, power lies in the social and interactive interpretation of credibility and truth, where "[v]alidity is about what 'we' consider true or untrue, real or not real in a given context" (2021, p. 170). Validity can be constructed in complex ways in artistic work (2021, p. 171), where abstract, naturalistic, and sensory validity constructions can be used interchangeably. Thus, artists have numerous ways of defining and depicting reality (2021, p. 171). This questions whether validity is low when deviating from naturalism, or high in the sense that it is a representation of truth (2021, p. 170). Although the principles of taking a selfie and the available resources are the same amongst all selfie takers, artists or not (2021, p. 3), Sherman and Ulman´s selfies deviate from non-selfie artworks in that they use visual resources in unconventional ways. The artists´ uses of resources are analysed with this in mind while considering their meaning-making processes using selfie genres.

3.4   Selfie Genres

Investigating the selfies in relation to genre characteristics serves to further clarify what the intention and strategic practices behind the use of selfies are. Genre classification considering both image and text illustrates that selfies can communicate different meanings. Classifying selfies into genres "contribute to the social structuring the meaning" (Eagar & Dann, 2016, p. 1838) and is valuable for nuancing the underlying motivations and choices within the practice of taking selfies. Selfies are "oft pathologized and moralised" (2016, p. 1835), with arguments that selfies entail a narcissistic focus on the self (Tiidenberg, 2018, p. 8, 132). Looking at different types of selfie genres can uncover the selfie practices as more than one thing, and how it relates to different types of online identity construction. The different selfies can also say something about what intentions, or strategic practices, are behind their use.

The selfie genres consider both image and text in combined meanings. As with the presented multimodal discourse analysis, Eager and Dann (2016) underscore the importance of considering all aspects of communication within the act of taking and posting a selfie, where both images, "what is being shown" and text, "what is being said" and what the "story being told between the two" is being analysed (p. 1852). They provide a framework of selfie genres where both visual and textual data are considered in the classification. Eager and Dann take a narrative perspective to the selfie practice where the combination of mimesis and diegesis determine what type of genre the selfie is. Mimesis is used in relation to the image, as the visual depiction of the self. This is combined and contextualized with diegesis, related to the captions associated with the image. The diegesis can contribute to capture the "intentional storytelling act of image and text" (2016, p. 1835). ´Intentional´ act is key, as it underscores agents´ choices behind the "deliberate human-brand (explain more?) narratives expressed in selfies" (2016, p. 1835).

Eagar and Dann propose seven different key selfie genres, where five of them are of particular significance to the analysis of Sherman and Ulman´s selfies. The described genres are predominant but can also appear in overlapped shapes and forms (2016, p. 1842). The genres are autobiography, parody, propaganda, romance, self-help, travel-diary and coffee-

table book, where five are considered relevant for the analysis of Sherman and Ulman´s selfies. The autobiography selfie can be compared to diary-entries, where a documentation of a person´s life serves as a motivational factor. The narrative interpretation is constructed around ´real´ life events (2016, p. 1842). The parody selfie uses humour to comment on trends and practices within the selfie discourse. Typical ways of parodically presenting oneself involves "deliberate contortion of facial features to present a grotesque self", and the use of diegesis captions to underscore the intention of the selfie as a parody depiction and commentary. This emphasises the break from the otherwise predictable discursive practices (2016, p. 1845). The propaganda selfie´s focus is on appearance, where the desired audience response is to be considered attractive. The propaganda selfie communicates "physical attractiveness for the sole purpose of seeking followers" (2016, p. 1845). The selfie-taker manipulates the image using certain poses, light, clothes, make-up, camera angles and image editing (2016, p. 1845). This selfie is closely related to constructing a personal brand and commercialising one´s image, where a calculated and transactional relationship between the selfie-taker and the audience is a predominant driving force. The self-help selfie documents the journey of self-invention within a specific field of social capital, such as fitness, diet, hair, and make-up. The selfies are often flattering depictions of the selfie-takers mastering their field of interest (2016, p. 1848). Finally, the coffee-table book selfie is considered specifically in relation to the artistic dimension of Sherman and Ulman´s selfies. The coffee-table book selfie classifies "the use of the selfie as an aesthetic artistic endeavour" (2016, p. 1849), with a focus on imagery. Selfie takers using this genre makes a conscious effort to master and use visual and photographic techniques for aesthetic purposes. They demonstrate that selfie-taking can go beyond constructing oneself as a human brand, but rather display oneself as art (2016, p. 1849).

The described selfie genres demonstrate that taking and posting selfies is a practice with diverse underlying motivations and aims which relate to strategic practices. If the motivation behind a selfie is a large audience as demonstrated by the propaganda selfie, the selfie-taker accommodates the rules of what is considered attractive by dominating taste regimes (2016, p. 1851). Choices and agency are more clearly represented in the parody genre than in the propaganda selfie. A parody is essentially looking at an existing condition in a new way, which implies making a statement that places the subject in a new subject position. The

genres "reflect an individual´s choice in (…) positioning within and against" dominating structures on Instagram (2016, p. 1851), where the choice implies a person´s agency. These genres provide a framework from which to explore the characteristics of Sherman and Ulman´s selfies, and to consider them in relation to identity construction and strategic practices.

3.5   Conclusion

The multifaceted approach of CDS, multimodal discourse analysis, genre classifications and DAA provide the framework for the analysis in this thesis and is necessary to contain the complexity of this investigation. The combination of these approaches allows the analysis to access facets of selfie practices which are significant for a critical and didactic approach to identity construction and agency. CDS is used as an approach to social media discourse and selfie practices. It provides perspectives that can be used to engage pupils in critical thinking and to approach identity construction in social media from a critical standpoint. Multimodal discourse analysis is applied to accommodate selfies as both images and text, and to consider the meaning of both resources as a combined unity. It relates to the need for visual literacy skills in a society that speaks through images in combination with text, and the importance of implementing visual literacy training in schools. The classification of different selfie genres establishes selfies as more than one thing and provides perspectives on how selfies can be used for different types of communications and identity constructions. Finally, DAA is applied because it accommodates the rapidly changing subject positions in social media and provides an analytical approach which can be used to recognise acts of agency. Agency´s function relates to choices, which have an influence on what identity construction becomes. The combination of these approaches is formed to meet the overarching research question of this thesis, stated as *How can Instagram selfie art be used didactically to critically approach identity construction and agency?*

4. Analysis and discussion

Instagram selfie artworks by Cindy Sherman and Amalia Ulman provide important perspectives on authenticity and the fleeting nature of identity construction, while at the same time prompt critical perspectives on stereotypical depictions and selfie practices in an English-speaking and global social media discourse. Their works provide two different gateways for exploring identity construction in the 21st century.

Amalia Ulman had her artistic breakthrough on Instagram with a parafictional hoax. Using Instagram to stage the performance *Excellences and Perfections*, a fiction experienced as fact (Lambert-Beatty, 2009, p. 54), Ulman presented her audience with a fictional persona under her real name. Over five months, the persona went through a series of beautifying practices and lifestyle changes to achieve a level of excellence and perfection. She used images she found on the internet to fake a breast augmentation, went to pole dancing lessons and on diets. She used self-enhancing editing tools, postures, and settings to ´perfection´ and created a consumerist fantasy that quickly drew thousands of followers. Her was fooled, both those who already knew her as an artist and those who started following her on Instagram, into thinking that it was her ´authentic´ self who was depicted in the selfies.

Cindy Sherman is renowned and celebrated artist who is famous for her photographic works where makes herself look like personas in stereotypical representations and roles found in media. She took her work in a new and exciting direction when she started using selfies as a means of artistic expression. Sherman´s Instagram work can both be seen as a continuation and reinvention of her earlier photographic work. Whereas she mostly used makeup, props, and costumes to create personas in her earlier photographs, on Instagram she uses digital editing tools typically employed for self-enhancement practices to distort and disfigure the appearance of her personas. Her images are colourful, magnificent, and often clown-like. They deliver critical comments on social media discursive practices and can be read as parodies of stereotypical representations in social media and self-enhancement practices. Sherman´s work is not parafictional but shares several similarities with the genre. Her works are performative, meaning "they effect or produce something rather than

describe or denote it" (Lambert-Beatty, 2009, p. 61). Sherman´s fictional personas present their selfies on Instagram and interact with their strange familiarity.

Although different in their use of selfies, both artists employ their bodies as canvases to create fictional personas who act out and/or comment on ´given´ subject positions and identity constructions on social media. Through their performative art and as artists on Instagram they provide perspectives on changing subject positions and agency. Ulman navigates three different subject positions. First, as an Instagirl whose relationship with the audience is of a transactional nature and based on beauty, money, and status. Secondly, within the art community as a young ´pretty and quirky´ artist. Finally, her parafictional hoax gives her new subject position. Her strategic uses of subject positions can be seen as acts of agency. Sherman´s professional and well-established position as an artist within the global art community provide different conditions under which she demonstrates her agency. Her agency lies perhaps first and foremost in choosing to invent a new subject position by creating art for Instagram, thus compromising her established position as a photographer celebrated for her photographic art. She also navigates different subject positions within Instagram discourse, as the persona in the images, as herself and as the artist.

4.1 Cindy Sherman

Cindy Sherman (b. 1954), a photographer who emerged in the late 70s, uses her body to create personas who reflect society´s fixation with identity and the constructed self. She applies make-up, prosthetics, and digital technology to create personas whose looks are far removed from her own and who displays a diversity of human types. Since her first exhibition in 1980, Sherman has received great recognition for her work (Gibson, 2019, p.484), and she is now one of the most established contemporary artists in the world. Of particular importance is her work "Untitled Film Stills" (1977 – 1980) where Sherman portrays female characters inspired by films and advertising. Although the characters are recognisable, they are not imitations of characters from specific films. Rather, in their creation Sherman "alluded to genres (…) [where] every element – framing, costumes, facial expressions and so forth – is so embedded in the collective memory that arouses a sense of

familiarity" (Ricci, n.d.). Her personas can be recognised as embodying social roles or as entering stereotypical representations derived from media. They have an everyday human quality to them. They are in motion, seemingly unaware of having their picture taken, and portrayed as "always in-between the action" (Ricci, n.d.). Their rich settings feed the narrative with a before and after. Thus, her personas seem more like someone you can meet on the street rather than a depiction of a stereotype. Rather, they represent social constructs that are recognisable.

In 2017 Sherman opened a public account on Instagram (Blasberg, 2019), where she embraced the use of selfie genres in her artistic work to comment on how social media shapes appearances and identity construction. The personas mirror how people construct themselves in selfie discourse through gaze, size of frame, point of view, and editing tools often used to ´beautify´ selfies. However, she uses these tools to distort and magnify the personas´ expressions, resulting in representations of them as "gloriously, catastrophically themselves" (Sehgal, 2018). Her selfies can be seen as partly parodic and partly humorous critical comments to social media selfie culture and the way people attempt to represent themselves in the most pleasing way possible. Sherman dislikes selfies that repeatedly are being taken at a specific angle aimed to look as flattering as possible (Blasberg, 2019), and "disgusted with how people get themselves to look beautiful" stating she is, "much more fascinated with the other side" (Gaylord & Newhall, 2016). In her selfies ´the other side´, termed by New York Times Magazine as ´Ugly Beauty´ (Sehgal, 2018) is put on full display.

Sherman´s art is not easy to categorize. She uses her body as the focal point of the image, but nevertheless avoids the category of self-portraits. She describes herself and the persona she creates as two separate beings, saying "I feel I´m anonymous in my work. When I look at the pictures, I never see myself; they aren´t self-portraits. Sometimes I disappear (…) seeing that other person that´s up there, that´s what I want." (Cafolla, 2016). Her personas are situated within the discourse on Instagram, communicate through their representations and are being commented on. They could be seen as depictions of aspects of Sherman´s identity, which in this case would deem them ´real´ or valid as representations of ´her´, or they could be purely fictional which from a naturalistic point of view would deem them ´fake´. Or they might be something in between; Sherman´s selfies call attention to "the ambiguity between

real and staged" ("Cindy Sherman", 2022), and to what extent our identity is a social construct (Ricci, n.d.). Thus, her personas are "far from being reducible to an alternative between falsity and truth". Although they are identifiable as fictional personas, they are somehow familiar, embodying recognisable themes related to being human and being social constructs. Sherman breaks down a dichotomy between fiction and truth, and lands on something which could be as Rubinstein claims, "outside of oppositions" (Rubinstein, 2018, p. 2). From a contemporary and non-essentialist perspective, an ´outside of oppositions´ type of identity might be what a real/imaginary and online/offline fused identity looks like.

4.1.1 Analysis and discussion

Figure 3: ´Ahoy´

Figure 4: ´Ready for fashion week´

Selfie genres

Sherman uses parody and art to comment on social roles and stereotypes in social media identity construction. The selfie artworks can be classified under an overlap of the parody selfie and the coffee-table book selfie genres. They can be classified as coffee-table book

selfies due to the artistic properties, and dedicated focus on imagery. A lot of skill goes into an artistic visual production, demonstrated by the use of photographic techniques and compositional choices, as well as how the selfies are made to frivolous and "mocked up in a way that is never too clean" (Hoban, 2012). Sherman said her intention for the personas in the *Untitled Film Stills* was to make them seem ´cheap and trashy´, and not to ´look like art´ (Ricci, n.d.). The ´cheap and trashy´ quality is seemingly transferred into her selfies, and underscore ´the other side´ of not only art, but of beautifully constructed appearances. Both selfies fall under the category of parody selfies due to their humoristic and exaggerated depictions of social media trends and self-enhanced selfies (Eagar & Dann, 2016, p. 1845). The parody selfie uses humour to provoke critical thinking, is related to emancipatory practices (2016, p. 1851) and make visible the choice of subject positions in social media discourse. The use of different selfie genres makes Sherman´s personas appear generic and familiar, while at the same time caricatural and comic.

Interactional meaning

The selfie constructs a sense of familiarity through the use of visual resources found in stereotypical representations aimed at interacting with an audience. Sherman´s personas are depicted in close-up size of frames, at an eye-level point of view, and in the ´Covergirl´ selfie, with a demanding gaze. These are considered generic representations within selfie genres; they are represented in most of the selfies in Veum and Undrum´s study (2018, p. 93, 95), and also align with characteristics of the propaganda selfie genre, where the rhetorical function is promotional and the tone persuasive (Eagar & Dann, 2016, p. 1843). The close-up provokes an imaginary relation where the depicted participants portray themselves in a close relationship with their viewers (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 125), thus suggesting a persuasive and insisting tone. The eye-level point of view which indicates an intention of interacting (Veum & Undrum, 2018, p. 95), can be seen as promotional, where the aim is to trade a #like4like (Eagar & Dann, 2016, p. 1846). The interactional relationship with the audience is enhanced by the demanding gaze addressing the audience directly (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 115). Sherman´s parallel positioning of her personas in terms of interactional meaning arouses a sense of familiarity. However, familiarity is also found in the unfamiliar use of interactional visual resources. Whereas the aim to interact in a propaganda selfie is complimented by flattering and alluring appearances (Eagar & Dann,

2016, p. 1845), the aim for interaction in the ´Covergirl´ selfie is followed by a deliberately distorted representation of "facial features to present a grotesque self" (2016, p. 1845). In the ´CoverGirl´ selfie, the persona imitates a typical posture with pouting lips and a direct gaze. However, the persona is staring at the viewer with wide-open eyes, exaggerated makeup, overly extended eyelashes, and forceful blue eyes. Her gaze not only demands the viewer´s attention, but also reveals an underlying emotion while doing so, which differs from a stereotypical friendly and inviting gaze (Veum & Undrum, 2018, p. 95). Her gaze seems desperate for the audiences´ attention, which could serve as a comment on the #like4like promotional interaction. Although the heightened expression deviates from what is usually seen in a ´normal´ selfie, Sherman´s interpretation of the selfie rises from a shared social media discourse. Thus, her comment on selfie practice prompts a feeling of familiarity and allows social media users to see themselves from a new perspective. The effect of recognizing the familiar in grotesque and exaggerated representations can be uncomfortable as it can reveal the ´madness´ of discursive practices. It can function as mirrors of our own subject positions and foster critical thinking towards our own practices. It can potentially be liberating, demonstrating that there are other subject positions to choose from. And it can entice laughter at the ´madness´ of social identity constructions.

Representational meaning

´The other side´ of beauty is realised through representational visual resources such as photo editing providing the audience with a playful, yet critical perspective on the effects of picture editing. The selfies are noticeably edited using digital tools and filters. In the ´CoverGirl´ selfie Sherman demonstrates a blatant use of filters, exaggerating certain aspects of the persona´s face and making obvious ´Photoshop´ fails, resulting in what can be perceived as a comical depiction of ´self-enhancement´. Her persona´s frown lines are gone, while on the rest of her face, the wrinkles seem to be untouched, perhaps exaggerated. Her chin seems distorted and the irregularities in her skin, enhanced. Her exceedingly long eyelashes, vibrant yellow and green makeup and the piercing blue colour of her eyes are clearly a product of editing, emphasising an unnatural and manipulated look. Judging from the strands of unconnected hair left hanging, seemingly great parts of her hair have been removed, and it looks as if the strands were forgotten in the editing process. Sherman is known for her unconventional use of editing apps such as the makeup simulation app

Perfect365 (Farago, 2017) and Facetune which aim is to `beautify selfies´ (Blasberg, 2019). Not only does she use the filters to deviate from established standards of beauty and ´unbeautify´ herself, but she demonstrates how it is done by doing it bluntly and ´wrong´. By a parodic and artistic use of filters, she skilfully challenges established ideas and practices accompanying the aim to ´look good´. This provides the audience with a perspective that amplifies self-enhancing editing practices, and critically questions what effect generic self-enhanced representations have on identity construction.

Linguistic meaning

The use of captions and text emphasise the parody and meaning potential of the selfies and is reflected in viewers´ comments and interactions. In both Sherman´s selfies the captions feed the personas narrative and underscore the parody genre. The selfie in *Figure 3* carries the caption ´Ahoy´ which is a nautical exclamation used for instance when hailing ´land ahoy´. It can also be used in a humorous way, to imitate pirates´ speech and in chatrooms as a greeting ("ahoy", n.d.). The nautical theme is further emphasised with the V-necked sweater giving associations to sailor´s clothes, as well as the contextualised background of the ocean. This understanding is supported by Instagram followers leaving comments such as "… a sailors delight! – Such a lovely religious experience kind of expression". A comment added by a follower, "Red sky in the morning, sailor´s warning" can feed into the interpretation and meaning potential of the image. Sherman interacts with her followers by ´liking´ many comments associated with this selfie. The prospect of interacting with an artist of this stature can play into how the followers respond to the image. Most of the fifty top comments give a positive response, and do not raise critical questions. The ´Covergirl´ selfie (*Figure 4*) can also be seen as an example of culture jamming, defined as "the practice of criticizing and subverting advertising and consumerism in the mass media, by methods such as producing advertisements parodying those global brands" (Swerzenski, 2021, p. 115). In addition to the caption `Ready for fashion week´, there is a layout which replicates a beauty magazine. The ´title´ of the magazine is "Perfect Style CoverGirl". On the bottom of the page is the caption "The beauty issue", and to the right of it "fashion week", written on a sticker that looks like it is peeling off. The text on the sticker resonances the caption `Ready for fashion week´, but the peeling of it indicates fragile hope. Both examples demonstrate how

linguistic resources can play into, enhance and add meaning to a visual expression. Sherman presents a playful way of underscoring the parody genre through her captions and text.

Audience interaction

Audience response to Sherman´s art and the interaction with her audience demonstrates how truth and fiction is a complex dichotomy. Although Sherman previously has stated that she and the personas are two different things, in the ´Ahoy´ selfie she acknowledges her presence by ´liking´ comments which combines descriptions of her persona with her personal name, such as "Cindy Beckham", "Cindy the bearded dreamer" and "Macho Man ala Sherman". The ´likes´ also respond to the male depiction being interpreted as more than one thing, including an image of her, exemplified by her ´like´ on the "mancrush on her/especially when she is manly" comment. Some comments seem more personally aimed at her, most often in praising words such as "You are breathtakingly amazing" and "Soul Mother, I love you 💝 ❤️", which are also liked and recognized by Sherman. As an artist, she acknowledges the effect of her creative act by ´liking´ the comment "Breaking gender norms". Interacting with ´likes´ has limitations, though. It does not provide any room for interpretation beyond looking at what is ´liked´. Thus, there is no way to know a deeper intention behind the ´like´, aside from stating that the comments are being acknowledged by her. One example is found where she comments using ´longer text´, where she discloses how effects in her work are made. One of the comments directed at the red sky in ´Ahoy´, reads; "My god…is this real?" whereas Sherman answers, "just an in-camera effect from 07´", which she elaborates in answer to another comment, saying "`07 had a fun camera". All the dimensions brought forth by the audience on Sherman as an artist, person, fictional persona, or ´real´ persona represented in the picture as a male, who in turn is interpreted as macho, gay and a football player, demonstrates how complex the space between truth and fiction is, and thus how blurred the line between the two can be. The story of the persona and Sherman as a person and artist are intermingled on Instagram.

Agency

Sherman´s positioning of herself on Instagram as an artist who makes use of the interactional aspects of the platform, give herself and her audience agency. Instagram as a space for art opens for both artist and audience agency (MacDowall & Budge, 2021). By

sharing her art on Instagram, Sherman gives a wide audience the possibility to see and interact with her art, as well as respond to it by publishing comments. The context of Instagram provides different opportunities for artists and audiences than what a physical gallery can offer (2021, p. 109). According to MacDowall & Budge (2021), the "shifting power dynamics vis-à-vis gallery and visitors, and artists and viewers [result] in a growing democratisation of audience art experiences" (2021, p. 151), where interpretation and reactions of artworks can prompt audience agency (2021, p. 137). The agency of the audience and ´democratisation of experiences´ on Sherman´s art are visible in the comments given by the audience, and how they are replied to by Sherman.

Sherman´s discursive agency is demonstrated through her artistic position as well as choice of subject positions. She positions herself as an artist who uses selfie genres to create artwork, as a body for the personas, as a person of great recognition in the global art community, and as ´herself´ - the ´agent´ or navigator, who operates choices and manoeuvres between the different subject positions. When she opened an account on Instagram with the intention of posting selfies, she knowingly stepped into existing subject positions within the selfie and art discourses with "particular behaviours, protocols and expectations" (MacDowall & Budge, 2021, p. 130). Using parody and art, she chose not to self-identify with a subject position where the use of filters for self-enhancement is an extended practice, but rather invented a new subject position (Leipold & Winkel, 2017, p. 524). Being a well-established artist gives Sherman "discursive opportunity structures" and agency (2017, p. 524) that may influence her strategic practices. Sherman had a large audience prior to Instagram, but by using Instagram she reached a new audience and was able to make use of the selfie genre to create new artistic expressions. Her agency might first and foremost be that she changed subject positions from being an artist in a well-established art community outside Instagram, to choosing a new subject position on Instagram. Sherman´s choices leading her into new subject positions, can be used as an illustration for young agents in social media who are navigating different discursive subject positions, and who are constantly faced with choices on how to construct themselves.

In summary, Sherman´s use of parody and art in selfies highlight issues of self-enhancement culture and being awkward human beings forced into social roles. These issues can be

related to other stereotypical self-representations, self-enhancing editing practices, communication through captions and comments, subject positions, and agency, and can offer perspectives on questions related to a truth/fiction dichotomy. How she chooses to use the selfie genre to make extraordinary art and parody selfies can inspire pupils with an awareness in terms of choices and possibilities when engaging in selfie practices. How to use Sherman´s selfies didactically to approach identity construction and agency, entails an understanding of how to read them, and reflect critically on them as parts of a discourse as well as the discourse they are commenting on.

4.2 Amalia Ulman

Amalia Ulman (b. 1989) is an Argentinian New York-based artist and filmmaker who uses performance, internet-art, installations, and video in her work. Amongst her major themes, Ulman explores consumerism and identity, and the links between the two. In 2014, she had her artistic breakthrough using Instagram to stage a performance titled "Excellences and Perfections". Through a scripted performance (Brady-Brown, 2021) she created a fictional young woman´s journey (Connor, 2014) towards ´perfection´ motivated by beauty, money and status. Her months-long journey was narrated through selfies with associated captions and hashtags. The persona´s appearance was inspired by the most popular Instagirls (Maguire, 2019, p. 23), especially so-called ´ghetto girls´, ´sugar babies´ and yoga influencers (Corbett, 2014). Her persona´s self-representation was taken to excessive lengths, where a "consumerist fantasy lifestyle" (Connor, 2014) is reflected in her use of make-up, clothes, a plastic surgery hoax, diets, and a variety of luxurious settings. After her first image with the text "Part 1" was posted, the account shortly amassed nearly 90,000 followers (Maguire, 2019, p. 13). On September 14, 2014, she revealed her hoax with a black and white photography of a rose, with the caption "THE END-EXCELLENCES AND PERFECTIONS" (Connor, 2014).

Ulman´s parafictional performance confronted and rattled two different ideologies revolving around her as a young woman and artist. These were represented by the Instagram

audience encouraging the fictive consumerist-driven persona on one side, and fellow artists condemning the persona, on the other. The idea for Excellences and Perfections came from Ulman´s frustration over making money and gaining recognition only when representing herself as "a pretty, quirky young artist", which she described as "fetishized" by the artistic community (Maguire, 2019, p. 23). With the creation of an Instagirl she boycotted her self-branding as an `artgirl´ and turned herself into a persona driven by self-enhancement and consumerism, which she said is "something that is not allowed in the art world" (Maguire, 2019, p. 23). As she acted out the performance, many artists, friends, and colleges judged her ´new look´ and did not believe it was a performance even when she told them so (Corbett, 2014). When she exposed her hoax, the followers who rooted for her persona, were robbed of their commitment in her, and those who did not approve of her persona, could have been similarly debunked and confused, judging from the meagre 123 likes the image received (Connor, 2014).

A parafictional experience such as this can change how people interact with the massive flow of self-representational content on social media and conjure a more critical outlook on truth and fiction, authenticity, and underlying ideologies tied to self-representations. Ulman revealed that the performance was about "how photography can be a signifier of class", cultural capital, as well as "undermining the pretension that social media is a place striving for authenticity" (Corbett, 2014). Ulman´s work raises issues of truth and fiction in identity construction and confronts our belief in the stories we are being told through selfies. Simultaneously, it identifies social media as a place for art and storytelling and underscores how Instagram is a place for experimenting with different accounts, identities without any restrictions as to whether what is being communicated is ´authentic´ or not. The parafictional performance makes visible ideologies in the art community and questions what effect these ideas have on aspiring artists, who are ´left out´ and judged by their practices. Underneath two of the selfies from the ´Excellences and Perfection´ series are being analysed considering these issues and their didactive potential for critically approaching the overarching issues of identity construction and agency.

4.2.1   Analysis and discussion

Figure 5: ´ Small presents are the best gifts. Paying attention to the details 🎎´

Figure 6: ´So so happy bout pole dancing session today it was soooooooo much fun and crazy

workout´

Selfie genres

Ulman uses different selfie genres to imitate stereotypical and trending representations resulting in a ´perfectly´ constructed persona. Her persona is first and foremost built on the fundamentals of the propaganda selfie, where a calculated, transactional audience relationship based on physical attractiveness is of most importance. This genre has a reputation as an "act of narcissism" (Eagar & Dann, 2016, p. 1846). Due to the transactional, as well as "commercialised and constructed personal brand" (2016, p. 1846) the propaganda selfie can be considered an "inauthentic market commodity" (2016, p. 1846). In contrast to most propaganda selfies where the represented participants are presented devoid of time and place, which seems to reduce the ´self´ to a "commodified image of market exchange" (2016, p. 1846), most of Ulman´s images are contextualised, often with detailed settings as with the selfies presented here. The convincing narrative is reflected in her surroundings. The selfies document her journey in a form of diary entries, which can situate the work in an overlap to the autobiography genre. In addition, her images can also fall under the self-help genre which is characterised by selfies representing hard work and discipline, exercise, and fashion to achieve social and personal success (2016, p. 1848). Ulman´s hoax can thus be seen as a mix of these three genres, which reflects the diverse Instagirls she used as inspiration. When she exposes her hoax, there is an interesting shift in genres from propaganda to a sort of parody and art. As opposed to Sherman who openly uses parody to exaggerate and expose self-enhancement culture through grotesque imitations, Ulman´s imitations opt for a text-book example of self-enhancement; her parody is one that takes self-enhancement to an unobtainable level. Her images are stunning, composed well and edited to perfection, bearing witness to her artistic skills.

Interactional meaning

Ulman´s parallel positioning with trending usages of social distance in shots, gaze, and point of view as interactional visual resources, strongly contribute to rapidly earning her thousands of followers. The interactional representations in both selfies indicate that a detached, yet transactional communication is designed as a part of the narrative. As opposed to the close-ups seen in Sherman´s selfies, medium and medium long shots are used in Ulman´s selfies, indicating a greater social distance and a less close relation between the persona and the audience (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 126). As in film, the closer a

camera zooms into the face, the more emotions are revealed (2021, p. 126) and the imaginary relation is experienced as more personal. The lack of gaze and addressing the viewers with direct eye contact underscores the constructed distance. In both selfies, the persona looks at herself on the phone while taking the selfie, thus avoids addressing the viewer as a ´you´ (2021, p. 115), while keeping the focus entirely on herself and her appearance in the mirror. The persona offers him/herself up for observation. The absent gaze is commonly used in mirror selfies and encouraged in step-by-step instructions as it "prevents you from looking awkward or forced" as you ´would´ if you looked directly into the mirror (Tao, 2021). The absent gaze combined with medium and medium long shots draw attention to the persona´s appearance, clothes, and accessories, which, as already mentioned, is an aim in propaganda selfies (Shunatona, 2021). Although there is a constructed distance and absence of gaze which highlight the appearance and clothes, the point of view indicates the persona is aiming for a friendly relationship with the audience. The point of view in both selfies are eye level, which indicates the aim is to interact with the audience on equal levels. The medium and medium long shots, absent gazes and eye level point of views invite the audience in as onlookers to observe the commercial and successful acts and objects on display. Ulman´s performance is dictated by her aim to connect and interact with an audience, while putting the persona and her life on display.

Representational meaning

Using contextualised backgrounds and filters as representational visual resources, Ulman creates a persona of an otherworldly level of beauty, wealth, sexiness, and innocence. As opposed to propaganda selfies where the participants are presented in a void, these images are contextualised representations with sophisticated settings. Since the contextualized backgrounds provide "a particular location, a specific moment in time [and] a specific point of view" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 156), her personas are perceived as less generic than in propaganda selfies with no overlaps to other genres (2021, p. 156). The selfies convey a strong narrative, brought forth by characteristics found in the diary format in autobiography selfies, and self-help selfies promoting health and exercise. The selfie from the pole dancing studio indicate that the persona is active, healthy and a dancer. In the elevator selfie, the persona is depicted as an urban shopper. Both images have backgrounds which are dominated by infinity mirror effects. In the first image (*Figure 5*), a so-called

´elevator reflection selfie´ (Shunatona, 2021), the infinity mirror effect is dominating most of the background, whereas in the selfie where she is at a pole dancing studio (*Figure 6*) there are three visible mirrors in heavy luxurious frames. The mirror is an old symbol of vanity and self-admiration (Nastyuk, n.d.), much like taking selfies is for many people today (Tiidenberg, 2018, p. 8, 132). Ulman´s distinct use of infinity mirrors can be seen as an amplification of these symbolic values. The persona in her calculated poses, her luxury surroundings and shopping bags (*Figure 5*) almost seem to be swallowed up and thrown back out of her own reflection. Ulman´s question of "How do we consume things and how do they consume us?" (Cafolla, 2016) echoes this interpretation. Her reflection in the mirrors can be seen as an endless procreation of production and consumption.

The setting in the pole dancing studio reflects a combination of health, innocence, and sexiness, giving references to ideological representations of women. The clean, white, and virtuous atmosphere of the studio, resounded in the persona´s blond hair and angelic expression, is made ´exiting´ with a contrast to the dance poles carrying associations to strip tease and sexiness. A carefully constructed mix of innocence and sexuality has been the subject for many discussions concerning women and ideologies. It can be related to what Simone de Beauvoir referred to as the antonym between the virgin and the flesh, or the "flesh dedicated to the devil" (Beauvoir, 1989, p. 96). In social media, sexualised depictions are continuously under scrutiny and discussions related to the subject are often linked to female selfie-takers and Influencers. Some claim stereotypical depictions of gender are being repeated and closely related to ´attention economy´, self-branding (Savolainen et al., 2020, p. 20) and commercial interests (Veum & Undrum, 2018, p. 86). Others claim Instagram "boosts feminist thematics that resonate widely, like individual empowerment and sex-positivity" (Savolainen et al., 2020, p. 20). Ulman´s "Excellences and Perfections" provide an opportunity to approach these types of questions, perhaps in particular because as the creator of the work, Ulman positions herself outside opposing arguments and ideological identifications.

Filters and editing have been used to effect, where the result is a perfectly executed illusion. The pole dancing image appears to have been edited due to the colour value, saturation, and luminosity. The minor bending of the mirror frames which indicates some editing has

been done to her body, seems to blend into the image as a part of an overall ´mirage´ of her day at the studio. Ulman shares that a lot of labour goes into the work, and that although Instagram is about spontaneity, "women take time to fabricate their pictures" starting with hair, makeup, and lighting (Corbett, 2014). There are several tutorials that give step by step instructions on how to create the perfect selfie. One example encourages the use of filters but warns that "If you cannot make your edits completely natural, err on the side of caution and delete the changes rather than posting an obvious fake" (Bear, 2021). The use of filters is commonly known, accepted, and instructed, but humiliated if exposed as ´Photoshop fails´. On Instagram, @celebface is an example of an account dedicated to expose selfie tampering by pointing to tilted and bend doorframes, surrounding objects and ´weird looking´ body parts. A non-edited image can also be the cause of humiliation. When a member of the much-photographed Kardashian family accidentally had an unfiltered photo of her posted online, the news spread like wildfire and was covered by major newscasts such as CNN. There was nothing spectacular about the image, besides the ´normal´ depiction of her. Kardashian published a statement saying, "the picture was beautiful" but that she "unapologetically" would "continue to use filters and photo editing" (France, 2021). Kardashian also stated that "My body, my image and how I choose to look and what I want to share is my choice" (France, 2021). Kardashian claims agency in her choice to use filters, and how to edit herself according to her own choice. Ulman´s persona can be seen as resounding this self-enhancement culture and presents a perfect ´spontaneous´ selfie. It seems an underlying aim in selfie practices where self-enhancement and lifestyle promotion is concerned, is not to create a depiction of reality, but to create the perfect illusion.

Linguistic meaning

The captions and hashtags combined from both selfies affirm the persona wanting to appear as an athletic, kind, and attentive consumerist, who is supported or opposed in comments from her followers. The pole dancing image carries the caption ´So so happy bout pole dancing session today it was soooooooo much fun and crazy workout´. Ulman´s excessive use of ´so´ can indicate the persona wants to come across as someone who endures hard workouts and has fun doing so. The exaggerated use of ´o´ can also indicate that she feels the need to emphasise how much she works out and thus exposes an underlying insecurity. The wish to make an impression is also reflected in the second caption in the elevator selfie

(figure 5), ´Small presents are the best gifts. Paying attention to the details ✧´. Small gifts are often luxury gifts, thus an indication that the persona is aiming to represent herself as a person worthy of high-end consumption. In this selfie, Ulman uses the hashtags #friends #family #birthday #sister, which gives the impression her as warm, family-oriented, caring, and willing to spend time and money on the perfect gift. The captions and hashtags as linguistic resources contextualise the image and conjoin the act of storytelling and narrative (Eagar & Dann, 2016, p. 1835). Ulman´s scripted narrative is clearly visible in both images and text, where the two resources work together in her storytelling act. Although she uses text sparingly, the text provides additional information that develops her narrative and emphasises what she wants the persona to represent.

Audience interaction

There are not many visible comments associated with the selfies. This might be due to the account being archived, and perhaps comments dismissed. In the elevator image there are only two comments and in the dance studio image there are five, all of which are supportive and cheering her representation on. Ulman also said she did not respond to many of the comments, because she "found it difficult not being able to respond to certain comments" (Corbett, 2014). When looking at some of the other archived selfies, there are some comments coming from her audience that are of interest. One of the comments exemplify the dismissal of her as an artist in the role saying, ´I used to take you seriously as an artist until I found out via Instagram that you have the mentality of a 15 year old hood rat´. The comment is answered by another user saying, ´Why is the meaning and value of the work diminished when the artist does not act in a way the viewer feels they should? ´ (Rhizome, n.d.). The comments reveal how Ulman´s parafiction provokes, divides, and make visible female ideologies in the art community. Thus, the comments play into the context of performance as linguistic resources.

Ulman´s parafiction

Ulman´s parafiction touches on two opposing ideas of her as a young woman – the self-enhanced, sweet, and sexy consumerist and the `pretty, quirky young artist´, represented in her Instagram audience. When exposing her persona as an act, the audience on both sides are being challenged. According to Lambert-Beatty (2009), when audiences experience

parafiction "where the fictional hangs on the factual – one is evaluating not only whether a proposition is fictional, but what parts of it are true" (2009, p. 78). Thus, a parafiction such as this can leave the audience with a sense of bewilderment, questioning what still can count as valid, what is completely made up, and if there is something left to be trusted at all. Ulman created the persona under her own name and implemented parts of her ´everyday´ life into the persona, such as the pole dancing which she originally engaged in as part of physical therapy after a bus accident, spent 2000 dollars on filler injections and a non-surgical nose job, and admits to having nothing against surgeries, saying she "really like[s] body modifications" (Corbett, 2014). Dean Kissick, who had an interview with her said that the two questions ´everybody´ wanted to know prior to the interview was whether she had a surgery or not, and why she had made "this massive Instagram performance" (Kissick, 2014). Thus, the parafiction can as Lambert-Beatty explains, "train us in skepticism and doubt, but also, oddly, in belief" (Lambert-Beatty, 2009, p. 78). It leaves the audience "curious and chastened" and with a changed interface with social media, where the "difference is a certain critical outlook" (2009, p. 82). Instagram and social media are suitable platforms for parafictions, as the lines between truth and fiction are blurred and bendable, which is also reflected in selfies which can orchestrate "identity which portrays a preferred representation of the authentic self" (Sylvester, 2019, p. 92). Thus, "[f]iction is no longer defined against an idea of the real" (2019, p. 65), but reflects the concept of identity and questions whether it should be redefined to include aspects of fictional selves, personal narrative and explore what an ´authentic´ representation really means.

Agency

Ulman´s parafictional hoax situates her outside ideological oppositions represented by the art community and consumerist interests and places her in a new subject position which is defended by her art. Ulman admitted to rejecting both a "self-branding" subject position on social media, as well as the subject position of a "stereotype of the young female artist" (Kissick, 2014), which led her to the ´Excellences and Perfections´ performance. She said the performance brought up "mixed feelings: on one side attraction and on the other deep repulsion, even nausea" (Kissick, 2014). She chose to invent a new subject position through her performance, which in a ´disguised´ way through the parafiction did not support either the ´artgirl´ or ´instagirl´ subject positions. While her parafiction was ongoing there seems to

have been a confusion as to what subject position she was acting out, as demonstrated in the comments from the followers on Instagram. When the hoax was exposed, she publicly declared herself neither an ´artgirl´ or ´instagirl´ but firmly established herself in a new subject position as an artist without gender implications. Thus, her discursive agency was demonstrated by making herself "a relevant agent in a particular discourse by constantly making choices about whether, where, when, and how to identify with a particular subject position" (Leipold & Wikel, 2017, p. 524). Her choices made when planning and executing the performance were marked by calculated strategic practices. Ulman´s script, and thus active choice to invent a new subject position, can be seen as the strategy for planning the outcome of her actions. Her strategy for amassing followers and likes was according to Ulman, based on "following trending topics", using "a photoshopped image of a woman and a bunch of popular hashtags" (Corbett, 2014). Instagram provides a suitable platform for choosing discursive agency and opportunities to act out performances such as these. Ulman demonstrates how embedded discursive ideologies can be rejected using art, and how the self can be reinvented by choosing new subject positions through the act of agency.

4.3 Conclusion

These artworks can provide pupils with important perspectives on authenticity and the short-lived nature of identity construction, while also offer critical perspectives on stereotypical depictions and selfie practices in social media discourse. Both Sherman and Ulman´s selfies can be read as multimodal texts responding to self-enhancement practices and identity construction. Sherman´s ´Covergirl´ selfie (*Figure 4*) is mimicking self-enhancement practices by culture jamming a beauty magazine front page. The layout of the magazine is constructed as a ´real´ front page, whereas the persona is clearly manipulated and edited to look opposite from what is generally known in self-enhancement discourses. Sherman uses filters otherwise known to beautify images, to distort and change the appearance of the persona completely. The combined result of text and image is a selfie that parodies self-enhancement practices and makes visible the effects of commonly used filters by using them in an entirely different way. The ´Ahoy` selfie (*Figure 3*) can be read as a text

introducing the face of a stereotype, we did not know we had. Judging from the comments from Sherman´s followers, he can be related to different famous people, a sailor, a machoman to name a few. This persona is familiar, yet different. He is fictional yet truthful in his familiar representation. The selfie can be used to look at how identity construction can be stereotypical even though it is meant to be ´personal´, and how the lines between fiction and truth in identity construction can be blurred. Both selfies depict stereotypical representations in social media, though in distorted and grotesque ways. Sherman´s extreme use of digital editing is intriguing an can prompt an interest to look at what intentions and meaning are behind the use.

Ulman´s selfies critically engage in identity construction, bringing up questions regarding ´authentic´ self-representation and physical as well as digital self-enhancing practices. Ulman criticises self-enhancement discourses by taking on and mimicking subject positions within the discourse. Her selfies can be read as textbook examples of transactional selfies where poses, settings, editing and self-enhancing tools are used to perfection. The ´pole dancing´ selfie can be read as tribute to her sensual, athletic, and innocent representation. The selfie brings up issues in relation to how women can be performed as both sexy and innocent at the same time. The second selfie is read as a tribute to her caring, family-oriented, and consumer representation, which brings up issues of capitalist interests and values. As with all types of discursive practices, if strong enough, these types of influences can have a dictating effect on how people act in certain discourses and how identity construction can be shaped accordingly. Ulman´s masterpiece rests on how she managed to create a full-blown hoax that when exposed, revealed how something seemingly authentic was completely inauthentic. The selfies can be used to look at one´s own discursive practices and examine how they shape the way we present and want to present ourselves. They can also be used as a starting point for a discussion on what ´authentic´ means and relate this to consumerist trends, and questions of truth and fiction in on and offline practices and self-representations.

The proposed selfie genres by Eagar and Dann are useful for examining different characteristics of the selfies. Both of Sherman´s selfies can be seen as an overlap between parody selfies and coffee-table book selfies genres. The use of the word ´coffee-table book´

stems from an inspirational book that rests on a coffee table, often with artistic images (Eagar & Dann, 2016, p. 1849). Coffee-table book selfies have a focus on photographic technique and aesthetics. Sherman´s selfies also share characteristics with the parody selfie, which through facial looks, clothes, takes on trends and humour include commentary on the self and the discourse they are parodying (2016, p. 1844). Ulman´s selfies can be read as having characteristics from different genres where the propaganda selfie communicating physical attractiveness is the most dominant one. However, since the selfies are presented as parts of a hoax, their properties as coffee-table book selfies are of most significance. The selfie classification presented here has didactic potential as it explains well the different properties of the different genres, which can for pupils when reading and producing their own selfies.

Both artists give meaning to the word agency through their use of art and in how they place themselves on Instagram through their selfie statements. Ulman provides a fascinating example of someone who navigates different subject positions strategically, both during and after her parafictional performance. Sherman uses her subject position on Instagram to connect to a new audience and reinvent her art. Both examples can be used to look at how choices factor in on subject positions and agency and how that influences the composition of selfies. This investigation and discussion show that Ulman and Sherman´s selfie art can be implemented into ESL learning as they provide important perspectives on authenticity and selfie identity constructions as transient yet significant. Selfies convey meaning connected to the person holding the camera. Critical perspectives on stereotypical depictions and selfie practices are important to make informed choices on what this meaning should be.

5. Selfie art in the ESL classroom

This chapter explores why and how implementing Instagram selfie art in ESL learning can be used to critically approach identity construction and agency. The work is focused on using visual literacy tools to make meaning and understand the images and text as a unified whole, and to approach the artworks´ issues from an informed and critical perspective. Firstly, I will explore how upper secondary English competence aims and the core curriculum include and present visual literacy, identity, and critical thinking. Secondly, this chapter will explore how the selected artworks by Ulman and Sherman can be used to work with and critically approach issues of identity construction. Thirdly, this chapter will provide activities and practical suggestions for classroom implementations of Sherman and Ulman´s selfies, visual literacy, and selfie genres, before moving on to how the work provides perspectives on subject positions and agency.

The chapter argues that Instagram selfie art by Ulman and Sherman need to be implemented in ESL learning because these works raise issues on authenticity and the fleeting nature of identity constructions online, while at the same time provide critical perspectives on stereotypical depictions in social media discourses. To accommodate a contemporary concept of identity as ´becoming´, the chapter argues that a non-essentialist perspective on identity needs to be incorporated into the Norwegian curriculum, and that online communication and identity construction must be taken into consideration when looking at identity in schools. Visual literacy also needs to be given a higher priority in Norwegian schools, as visual literacy skills are important not only for reading and writing identity constructions such as the selfie, but as a skillset necessary in today´s image-saturated society. Pupils participate in a global English world where they communicate their selfies and read selfies in English. The pupils need to learn how they can communicate online using English in a critical way when they compose their selfies. How they read and write selfies are important for how they construct their ´selves´ online. Thus, this chapter argues that pupils need visual literacy skills to critically approach selfies online, and to compose their own selfies in a meaningful way.

5.1 Identity, critical thinking, and visual literacy in the Norwegian curriculum

The implementation of Instagram art, visual literacy, identity, and critical thinking in upper secondary school English is supported by the Norwegian curricula, although with some moderations. These moderations mainly concern the concept of identity as expressed in the Core value "Identity and cultural diversity" and will be discussed in detail underneath. The discussion is followed by an exploration on how the core value "Critical thinking and ethical awareness", with an emphasis on ´critical thinking´, can be implemented in the didactic work on reading and producing selfies. Lastly, two aims from the English curriculum for Vg1 upper secondary school are considered. These aims and how to accommodate them using visual literacy and multimodal text will be discussed in the last part of this section.

5.1.1 Core curriculum

´Identity and cultural diversity´ is regarded as one of the ´Core values of the education and training´ in the Norwegian Core curriculum. How the concept of ´identity´ is defined deviate from the already established non-essentialist approach to identity and identity construction in this thesis. An essentialist view on identity has traditionally dominated the Western world and is reflected in the Norwegian Core Curriculum. Essentialism can be defined as "the practice of regarding something (such as a presumed human trait) as having innate existence or universal validity rather than being a social, ideological, or intellectual construct" ("essentialism", n.d.). A person is regarded as having a core identity largely based on inheritance, culture, gender, and national identity (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 261). The Norwegian Core curriculum mainly bases ´Identity and cultural diversity´ on aspects related to national history, culture, and Christian and humanist traditions. The first paragraph of the value description states, "Insight into our history and culture is important for developing the identities of pupils and their belonging in society. The pupils shall learn about the values and traditions which contribute to uniting people in our country" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). The value description consists of six paragraphs where most consider identity from a Norwegian cultural perspective and include cultures of minority groups such

as Sami, Kvens, Jews, Forest Finns, and Romani people. Although the importance of "cultural understanding" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017), in relation to globalisation is visited in the last paragraph, culture is not expounded beyond national and ethnic concerns. In relation to identity as something beyond shared cultures, it is briefly stated that the schools are obligated to "support the development of each person´s identity" and "make the pupils confident in who they are" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). The aim to make pupils ´confident in who they are´ is not explained beyond culture as inheritance and is again linked to the need for ´common values´.

A study done on Swedish and Finnish curricula shows similar essentialist tendencies and can be used for comparison. The researchers, Zilliacus et al., worked from a non-essentialist approach to cultural identity which includes aspects of gender, sexuality, language, and social class, in addition to cultural inheritance and ethnicity. They consider the different aspects as dynamical and to "inter-relate and criss-cross within people´s lives and in social relations" (Zilliacus et al., 2017, p. 169). The study points at the "importance of addressing policy discourses on pupils´ cultural identities in order to ensure non-essentialist and socially just teaching and educational practice" (2017, p. 166), and seek a Nordic education model that addresses a concept of identity that consider the dynamic and multifaceted nature of culture and identity to truly meet its aim of ´one school for all´ (2017, p. 177). Similarly, the Norwegian core curriculum stipulates ´one school for all´ in the principle for an inclusive learning environment, stating that "school shall develop an inclusive environment that promotes health, well-being and learning for all" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). To reach this aim, I support the findings of Zilliacus et al. and seek a definition of identity and culture from the Ministry of Education and Research, that involve non-essentialist perspectives where culture is considered outside the margins of national inheritance and ethnical background, and where the concept of identity is re-evaluated to also consider identity and identity construction in online networks and cultures. Working with selfies as potential identity expressions can provide levels of understanding of what culture and identity can be. It also demonstrates that identity development is something that can take place online, which must be acknowledged not only for its possibilities of communicating with several different cultures and people, but also for critical approaches to online identity construction to be formed and articulated.

´Critical thinking and ethical awareness´ is another core value which is addressed in the core curriculum and central when working with online identity construction. This thesis has a focus on critical thinking which is linked to "the ability to reflect, judge and evaluate" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). These skills can be worked on and used when approaching social media discourses and discursive practices, which relate to young people´s online activities. Ulman and Sherman´s selfie artworks provide gateways for looking at self-representation and identity construction in selfie practices and can give pupils angles for employing critical thinking and transfer them into their own practices. In the description of the core value pupils are encouraged to "understand that their own experiences, points of view and convictions may be incomplete or erroneous" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). Using selfie practices, pupils can reflect on how others self-represent, but also look at how they represent themselves, and evaluate the choices they make in doing so. Pupils should also be able to re-evaluate old ´truths´, in that "[i]f new insight is to emerge, established ideas must be scrutinised and criticised by using theories, methods, arguments, experiences and evidence" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). Identity could represent a concept that is provided with new insights by online and globalised culture, as well as deconstructivist influences. Providing the pupils with critical thinking when approaching both an essentialist idea of identity, as well as a fragmented and modern idea of identity, is important to be able to balance their views.

5.1.2 English curriculum Vg1 upper secondary school

The use of digital multimodal text and visual literacy is most prominently supported by the following competence aims from The English curriculum for Vg1 upper secondary school (Competence aims retrieved from the Ministry of Education and Research, 2019).

- discuss and reflect on form, content and language features and literary devices in cultural forms of expression in English from different media in the English-speaking world, including music, film and gaming
- use appropriate digital resources and other aids in language learning, text creation and interaction

The first competence aim addresses different types of media in relation to form, language features, literary devices and content. As specified in section 2.1.1, the selfie is a multimodal text with a particular visual form entailing a smartphone photograph of the person holding the phone. The lexical features entail captions and hashtags. Related comments can also be taken into the interpretation of the combined meaning of the selfie. Selfies´ contents are relevant in relation to cultural expressions belonging in the English-speaking world. Here, a distinction between ´belonging in´ the English-speaking world´ and ´from´ the English-speaking world is made. This is a reference to the global online community that makes up a shared English-speaking online world. Reading and creating selfies are practices that belong there. The use of the word ´Content´ in the first aim can thus be seen as belonging to a global English world as opposed to one belonging to native speakers of English only. The content can be explored using the proposed selfie genres. The selfie can be considered a ´cultural form of expression´, where the pupils can reflect and discuss selfies taken by others, which in this case involves the selfie artworks by Sherman and Ulman. The pupils can also reflect and discuss their own practices and choices when producing selfies and examine how their practices relate to the social media discourse as a global English-speaking discourse.

The second competence aim focuses on using digital resources in the production of a text and involves the dimension of interaction. The selfie comprises both digital resources and interaction. The framework of selfie genres can help pupils differentiate between different types of genres and thus provide them with choices in the production of their own selfies. The framework can inspire to experiment with new types of genres and be used to reflect on the impact the different genres have on identity construction and interaction. When producing a selfie, digital editing resources should be considered. Digital editing is frequently used in the production of selfies and as previously stated, digital resources can be used in several ways to construct the ´self´ in a selfie. Helping pupils become aware of different implications of digital editing can induce a critical approach to using these resources themselves. Experimenting with digital editing can provide the pupils with options to choose from. The selfie is a highly interactional cultural expression and has great potential in its ability to communicate and construct identity through image and text. Providing pupils with selfie artworks as examples of how to experiment with genres, editing and self-

representation, and allow the pupils to experiment with their own production of selfies, can educate the pupils in visual literacy skills and provide them with a critical and enlightened outlook on the selfie as a means for self-expression.

5.2 Sherman and Ulman – Identity construction and agency

Cindy Sherman and Amalia Ulman´s artworks make visible social roles, stereotypes, and discursive structures in social media selfie discourse. Although in different ways, their artworks problematize how we represent and construct our identities online. Sherman´s artworks give the ambiguous act of stereotyping a face. Sherman has said of her *Film Stills* that she "felt the characters were questioning something – perhaps being forced into a certain role" (Perkins & Andaloro, 2008, p. 103). Thus, these personas are not represented *as* stereotypes themselves, but as someone who are trying to act out a part. They are familiar on two levels; as the stereotype, and as ´a forced subject´. Ulman´s performance demonstrates how following trends and online instructions when constructing a persona on Instagram can accumulate followers and popularity. Her performance underscore how a purely fictional character is made to be authentic by audiences, and thus questions what it is we want to consider as ´authentic´.

Sherman´s art can be used to reflect on the personas as ´questioning´ the stereotypical roles they are attiring and explore how this can be related to the pupils´ own lives. From this view, the personas are considered as not *being* stereotypes but trying to act out certain stereotypes handed down to them, which can be relatable for the pupils. Reading the selfies as multimodal texts, the pupils can reflect on issues of stereotyping represented in both image and text. The ´Ahoy´ selfie can be used to reflect on gender issues, how gender is represented in the persona, look at male stereotypical depictions in mass media, and judge whether this is illustrated in the persona´s appearance or not. Sherman´s ´Covergirl´ selfie can be used to look at stereotypical self-enhancement practices, such as digital editing and posing. Studying how the personas attire stereotypical roles can invite pupils to critically look at their own practices and explore stereotypical representations in their own online

communications. As addressed in section 2.2, social media stereotypes often originate from selfie representations that receive a lot of attention, are imitated, reproduced, and become integrated in a discourse as a discursive strategy. The representations do not appear from nothing, though. Stereotypes in selfies can be seen simultaneously in advertising, media, and personal profiles (Döring et al., 2015, p. 956), and build on traditional essentialist ideas found in gender representations for instance (Kondakciu & Souto, 2021, p. 94). These issues can be introduced to the pupils and discussed in relation to stereotypes, where they come from, how we choose to represent and what makes us construct our online identities the way we do.

Ulman´s selfie art and performance can be used to look at how strategic use of image, editing and self-enhancing resources, text, and trends with an intention of collecting followers can shape what identity construction and an ´authentic´ self looks like on Instagram. Ulman created the performance with the intention of collecting followers, and strategically used hashtags and trending topics to do so. She presented herself according to fashion, make-up, lifestyle, and consumerist trends, and shortly amassed thousands of followers. These self-representational aspects are depicted in the two selfies chosen from the series. The selfies can be used to explore consumerist trends, Influencers going from being amateurs to professionals and the ´Janus faced´ aspects of Instagram, which includes endless possibilities on one hand and surveillance and advertising on the other. Her selfies and performance raise questions of authenticity. As mentioned, Ulman´s fiction is made authentic by the audience, which raises questions as to what benchmark Instagram audiences have in relation to what the ´authentic´ is. Is it an illusion of the self – a ´self fiction´? Or is the ´authentic´ self in images, a photographic replica of the self as it is being actualized offline? Digital editing is commonly used but only acceptable if the editing appears natural. Thus, an illusion of reality is accepted. Is an illusion then also recognised as being authentic? To approach these questions in an informed way, the pupils need visual literacy skills to read and produce images themselves. They need to access the intention behind the images, or the contract so to speak. The contract can be – Let´s be creative! Who can make an amazingly fun and crazy illusion? Let´s have fun twisting reality around. Or the contract can be to produce a symbolic representation of truth. But a manipulated image of Kardashian standing by the pool should not be mistaken of how she looks standing there *in*

reality. Although it is common knowledge that the image is edited, it can nevertheless not pass as being what she looks like in real life. Ulman´s performance is an important work for approaching issues related to identity construction and authenticity on Instagram. It´s parafictional properties can teach the pupils to critically approach Instagram identity constructions and become aware of how they choose to represent themselves.

As agents and artists Sherman and Ulman demonstrate how identity construction is about choices. Ulman refuses her given subject positions as an Instagirl and artgirl though her parafiction and establishes herself outside this dichotomy. Ulman´s currently posted images of cigarette butts floating around in water on her Instagram account, could be used to demonstrate how far removed she is from what she posted in her performance piece. Sherman introduces herself to a new audience by choosing a new subject position on Instagram and by creating artworks in the selfie genre. Her previous photographic art and success story could be introduced to pupils for them to see the context of her selfie art. Introducing pupils to subject positions and agency using Sherman and Ulman´s examples can illustrate how choices ´make´ identity. The pupils can reflect on and perhaps be inspired to make use of Instagram´s other side of the Janus face – the one that opens for possibilities. Being aware and critical of one´s own given subject position is necessary to make choices and choose new subject positions. Sherman and Ulman´s art and work are windows into 21st century identity – through their art they change subject positions, always becoming. What we become is influenced by our choices. A critical look at how identity is constructed through images and text is important for young people to make informed choices.

5.3   Didactic implementations

Visual literacy skills are needed for pupils to be able to read the selfies and construct meaning of them as image and text combined. As has been previously addressed in section 2.3, the ability to read and write visual language has become increasingly important skills with the rise of social media and visual communication. These skills are also needed to approach to the ambiguous difference between truth and fiction in an informed way. Visual

literacy skills concern "what is seen with the eye and what is "seen" with the mind (Bamford, 2003, p. 1), and employ the critical skills of exploration, critique, and reflection (Bamford, 2003, p. 1). Images and symbols are open to subjective interpretation and cannot be categorized the same way as textual language. An understanding of visual semantics and syntax can provide an "ability to decode and interpret visual messages and to encode and compose meaningful visual communications" (Bamford, 2003, p. 1). Visual semantics refers to images as signs used to communicate meaning within a discourse and "the way images relate more broadly to issues in the world to gain meaning" (Bamford, 2003, p. 4). On Instagram, visual semantics refers to the ways posted images enter the social media discourse and process of communication. To develop an understanding of visual semantics in relation to working selfies on Instagram, questions regarding who created the image, for what purpose, intended audience, image manipulation, communication about identity, society issues reflected in the image and aspects of culture can be addressed in a classroom (2003, p. 4). To uncover the combined visual meaning of the selfie visual semantics should be seen in relation to visual syntax which is the "form or building blocks of an image" (Bamford, 2003, p. 3) of an image. The multimodal discourse analysis in section 3.3 made clear some of the most prominent features of visual syntax in Ulman and Sherman´s selfie artworks. In combination with suggested examples from Bamford (2003, p. 3), proposed visual syntax that can be looked at in relation to these selfies are background, editing, manipulation, colour, point of view, camera angle, gaze, compositional meaning between image and text and genre.

´Compositional meaning between image and text´ and ´genre´, relate to the selfies as multimodal texts consisting of different genres. The selfie should be considered as a composition of image, captions, and hashtags, where each mode forms a specific impact on the overall meaning. As previously mentioned, comments can be considered linguistic resources related to the context of the selfie. Comments can provide information about the context, and how a selfie is received and interpreted by an audience. Selfie genres can be considered as visual syntax, as they provide form and organisation to the selfie. However, as with all separate components under visual syntax and visual semantics, it is important to consider how they interrelate and how "they are combined within an image" (Bamford, 2003, p. 4) within a certain context. Visual literacy, as the ability to construct meaning,

interpret and produce images, entails more than skills in syntax and semantics. It is also about "the beliefs, values, and purposes for why you might want to read something or communicate" (2003, p. 4). It is about the overall act of reading and producing images as a part of social practice.

5.3.1 Sherman and Ulman´s art in the classroom

The overall aim for the proposed activities and practical suggestions for classroom implementation of Sherman and Ulman´s selfies is for the pupils to become acquainted with two influential artists on Instagram and employ their art to approach identity construction on Instagram using visual literacy skills. To make meaning from the images the pupil "uses the critical skills of exploration, critique and reflection" (Bamford, 2003, p. 1). The proposed didactic implementation is divided into three sections. The first section proposes pre-activities that can prepare the pupils for the overall topics related to identity construction. The two next sections are dedicated to visual semantics and syntax when reading and producing selfies and divided into: reading selfies: decode and interpret, and producing selfies: encode and compose meaningful visual communications (2003, p. 1). The final section explores how to address and work with subject positions and agency when producing selfies and in relation to online identity construction. The activities are described in a successive manner, starting with a pre-reading activity. The proposition is by no means a complete method, but merely suggest different activities that could be used at different stages of a learning process. An evaluation of how to implement this in an actual classroom would require didactic considerations beyond the scope of this study.

Working with critical thinking skills requires student engagement and participation. A traditional classroom structure where pupils sit in rows behind their desks can have a deflating effect on partaking where typically, a few confident speakers ´do the job´ for the rest of the class. Thus, a few easily applicable activities which involves all pupils as well as are proposed as a part of the didactic arrangement. Standing up, being physically active and able to move and gesture freely have positive effect on reluctant speakers of English as well as those with a limited vocabulary in English (Piazzoli, 2018, p. 28; McNeill, 2008, p. 27). It is

beneficial for all pupils to have variety of teaching practices which can engage and also be an effective way to use, understand and learn vocabulary (Carlsen et al., 2020, p. 295 – 296).

5.3.2 Pre-reading activities

Before introducing Sherman and Ulman´s selfies, overall topics which are relatable to the pupils can be addressed using pre-reading activities. The topics are social media, selfies, stereotypes/social roles, authenticity, and self-enhancement. The purpose of pre-reading activities is to increase understanding by accessing the pupils´ prior knowledge and to create interest in the topic. An easily accessible pre-reading activity that involves the whole class is to have the pupils articulate their associations with the given themes, either by writing associations down individually or in pairs before sharing them with the class verbally. The pupils can also share their associations and participate verbally by forming a standing ´association circle´ where a theme is given, and where the pupils share their one-word associations taking turns. As a further preparation, the teacher can guide the pupils into a discussion around associations that relate to the artists and their works.

Without introducing the artists, the artworks can be showcased one at a time to ensure a sole focus on the visual properties of the selfie. The initial omission of the Ulman and Sherman can cause the pupils to read the images in a different way than if they know the background and backstory of the images and artists. For example, being aware of Sherman´s status as an artist might have them take a different position towards the selfie art than if they are unaware. In the case of Ulman, and unless someone knows her work from beforehand, not introducing her as the artist behind the images could involve the chance to ´re-enact´ the performance to the pupils, where they become ´hoaxed´ themselves. Working individually, the pupils can be asked to write down initial associations while looking at the images. These can be shared in single utterances in an online word cloud generated by using interactive software such as metimeter.com. The word cloud will allow the rest of the class to see what their peers´ associations and thoughts are and to observe the most frequent associations and thoughts which will be visible as larger words. The cloud can be commented on, discussed, saved for later and revisited after the further visual literacy work

is done. A ´before´ and ´after´ word cloud can illustrate the progress that the pupils make and raise their awareness of what applying visual literacy tools can do to their understanding of images.

5.3.3 Reading images

To be visual literate means to be able to read images, which includes interpretation and decoding. The aim is to guide pupils into a sense of aesthetic appreciation, understanding, and to be critically aware of images´ capacity to manipulate (Bamford, 2003, p. 5). A critical knowledge such as this "is best developed through exposure to interesting and varied images and through thoughtful and thought-provoking questioning and discussion" (2003, p. 5). Thus, sets of questions related to the selfies which include both visual semantics and syntax have been formed. Before the pupils start addressing the questions it is necessary to explain to the pupils what is meant by the visual resources such as gaze, point of view, social distance, colour and editing tools. In what details this needs to be done depends on the group and how much practice they have in using these skills. It is important to remind the pupils that there is no ´right´ answer and that the questions are meant to guide them in their enquiring process. The questions are based on the questions found in Bamford´s table (2003, p. 4) and have been modified to accommodate the different images (see appendix 1 – 3).

One way to address the questions is by using the IGP method, where IGP is an acronym for individual, group, and plenary reflections (Gausdal, 2015). First, the pupils spend reflective alone time with the questions and the selfie, making notes. The pupils then meet in groups where they share their reflections one at a time. Group members may have appointed roles such as one taking the time and one making notes, summarizing the group´s reflections. It is important that everybody gets to speak, which can be ensured by giving each group member the same amount of uninterrupted time. The final step in the IGP method is sharing group reflections with the rest of the class and listening to what other groups have come up with. This can be done by one or two voluntary group members. This method encourages commitment, participation, and responsibility. It allows all pupils to communicate in English and equally participate in expressing their thoughts and reflections.

Introducing Ulman to the class – parafiction and authenticity

Introducing Ulman as the creator of the selfies as being a part of a parafictional hoax can add new levels to the interpretation and understanding of the selfies. If Ulman is unknown to the pupils, her life as an artist and work might take them by surprise. If the pupils were unaware of her performance beforehand, they can be led to believe that she was depicting her ´authentic´ self in the images. Their initial interpretations might have been in line with what Ulman wanted to convey to her followers – being an ´instagirl´ staging and taking perfect selfies, reflecting beauty, money, lifestyle, and self-enhancement practices. Being made aware of her hoax opens for new levels of interpretation, especially those concerning truth and fiction online, and a questioning of what the ´authentic´ is. Details concerning the hoax, including the length of the performance, the number of followers, her strategy to amass followers using trending topics, hashtags, and semi-fictional self-enhancement practices, her split audience, and comments from her followers, as well as what she said in interviews about her performance could provide the pupils with new perspectives from which to read the images. Working on these issues can involve addressing the following questions using the IGP method again or by having the pupils make note in pairs before sharing in class. The teaching strategies should be chosen with the anticipation of all pupils´ involvement. The following questions have been formed:

- How did Ulman amass so many followers in such a short time?
- Why did the audience, even those who knew her beforehand believe the performance to be ´authentic´?
- Is there a difference between truth and fiction in online identity constructions?
- Does the intention behind posting selfies influence how authentic an image is?
- Is there any difference behind the intention of an Influencer and a person posting travel selfies for example? What do they want to gain?
- Does money, beauty and lifestyle dictate how people represent themselves on social media?

Critically enquiring means being able to relate issues to own lives. Thus, moving the pupils from "broad media issues to specifics of individual constructions" (Perkins & Andaloro, 2008, p. 103) might be necessary for the pupils to critically reflect on how these issues potentially can have an influence on their own identity construction. A teaching strategy that can be

used to get the pupils engaged and to take their own personal stances in relation to their own experiences and online practices is the four-corner activity. In the four-corner activity (Sæbø, 1998, p. 316) the pupils show their stance on a statement through positioning themselves in one of four corners marked: strongly agree – agree – disagree – strongly disagree. After the pupils have been given a statement and have moved to a corner that best represent their stance, they are asked to justify their opinion. Working on Ulman´s selfies, the following statements could be used:

- The way I represent myself in social media is authentic

- I trust those I follow in social media to be authentic

- I can express myself freely in social media

- I learn more about myself from social media than from school

There are many ways to continue this activity. The pupils can discuss why they chose a certain position amongst those in the same corner. They can also move to other corners of the room if there are ideas or arguments that change their minds and question each other's ideas in an open and respectful way. The exercise can be debriefed by giving the pupils uninterrupted time to write their reflections in a journal. This gives the pupils the possibility of reflecting on and implementing what they have learned. Reminding the pupils of relating the issues to their own lives and identity construction might influence what they choose to include and reflect on. It is also wise to make the pupils aware that uncertainty is a part of the exploration and that these are all issues that need to be further explored.

Introducing Sherman to the class – stereotypical representations and photo editing
Introducing the pupils to Sherman´s *Film Stills* and comparing these with the selfie art can provide new levels of understanding the work. Both series of works depict social roles and stereotypes seen in mass media, where the film stills focus on generic film characters from 1950´s and 60´s, and the selfies depict types of ´roles´, stereotypes and photo manipulation practices that we find in social media. Providing the pupils with a few selected photographs from the *Film Stills* can deepen the understanding on Sherman´s work as depictions of social roles. Sherman´s quote on how "the characters were questioning something – perhaps being forced into a certain role" (Perkins & Andaloro, 2008, p. 103) could refine this point and be looked at in relation to how the personas in the selfies appear to be dressed into a certain

stereotype, as opposed to *being* stereotypes. This difference is important and can be used to illustrate that classifying people *as* something based on how they look, is insufficient to understand them as complex human beings. The contrasts between her selfies and *Film Stills* can be investigated further, where some of the clearest differences are found in uses of genre and photo manipulation. The pupils can be introduced to Sherman´s quotes on how she dislikes how people make themselves look beautiful in selfies, and that she is much more interested in ´the other side´. The comments from other users can exemplify how the audience receives her self-manipulation and how they interpret the depicted persona. To further investigate these aspects the pupils can be presented with the following questions, which as has been previously pointed out, should be addressed using teaching strategies that prompt participation of all pupils:

- Why does Sherman use editing tools in her selfies?
- How does Sherman use editing tools in her selfies?
- What editing tools does Sherman use?
- What does the use of editing tools say about the construction of the self in social media?
- Is it ok to edit selfies if the editing appears natural?
- Is it important to know if an image is edited or not?

To further investigate how these issues relate to the pupils' own lives and identity construction, they can work with the following statements using the four-corner activity. The activity would be conducted in the same way and with the same purpose as has been described in relation to exploring Ulman´s selfies. The following statements have been formed for this activity:

- Most people want to make themselves look beautiful in selfies
- Most young people want to make themselves look like someone on social media
- Most of my friends use filters and editing in their selfies
- Manipulating photos of oneself is just another way to tell your story

Again, the four-corner activity can be expanded into further discussion. The teacher´s role is important in this process. The teacher needs to make sure the pupils are heard and safe to

voice their opinions. He or she can also ask follow-up questions which prompt the pupils for further critical exploration. Also as mentioned, taking notes, and debriefing individually after working with these types of activities give the pupils uninterrupted time and space to reflect on their own lives and practices online. The teacher can underline the importance of ´critical thinking´ and to investigate their own online practices with this in mind. The pupils can be asked to think critically about how they construct their own identities online and whether they believe these constructions to be stereotypical reproductions of representing themselves or not. They can also be asked to reflect on the possibilities of identity construction on Instagram, as well as what the limitations of doing so might be.

5.3.4 Writing images

Writing selfies includes encoding and composing meaningful visual images. Producing selfies using different genres, digital tools and filters in new ways encourage creative and critical thinking skills and deepen the understanding of ethics related to photo manipulation (Swerzenski, 2021, p. 118). Unconventional use of ´beautifying´ filters and editing tools can flip the meaning and question the custom way of applying them. According to Swerzenski (2021), using editing software as a teaching tool "offers a means by which to expand our visual language, to explain how tools like filters, layers, airbrushes and others shape our perceptions of both images and culture at large" (2021, p. 122). Providing the pupils with a framework of different selfie genres can inspire them to experiment with different ways of representing themselves, and to regard what for them are typical ways of representing from a new and more critical perspective. The characteristics of selfie genres provide a structure for how to compose the selfie using image and text, and for experimenting with filters and editing tools. The sum of this exploration can provide the pupils with skills to write selfies in a more conscious and critical way.

The propaganda and parody selfie genres as proposed by Eagar & Dann (2016) can provide the pupils with a deeper understanding of the issues represented in Sherman and Ulman´s selfies. Working with these will allow the pupils to get more intimately acquainted with their use of visual resources, deepen the understanding of the issues they present and to get creative with different selfie genres. The pupils can be asked to work in pairs. This will allow

them to work together when they get specific as to what editing has been done to Sherman and Ulman´s selfies and how to apply these resources themselves. The pupils will need to understand how the genre characteristics are visible in Sherman and Ulmans´s selfies before they start working themselves. Although they can get creative with how they choose to interpret the genre per se, the properties of the selfie artworks should be reflected in their work. Not only can these provide a deeper understanding of the selfie artworks but using them as a scaffold can give the pupils access to the levels of technical skills, details and artistry that went into the production of the selfies.

Ulman´s selfies provide the pupils with the chance to get to know the characteristics of the propaganda selfie and become aware of the interactional audience relationship behind it, as well as the depicted consumerist and self-enhancing lifestyle. Keeping this in mind, the pupils can be asked to create the ´perfect´ selfie using suitable editing resources, camera angles, point of view and gaze. They can be asked to find instructions on how to create the perfect ´mirror selfie´, and to use these instructions as best they can. The use of ´costumes´ and props in the selfies can also be included. It is important to give equal attention to the caption and potential hashtags. This/these must read into and add the meaning of the selfie as a unified text. When the pupils are done creating the ´perfect´ selfie they can ´break the rules´ and create an imperfect selfie while staying within the same framework of the first selfie. For example, instead of using a soft white light, the persona might be standing under floodlights. Instead of keeping the gaze elegantly directed at themselves on the screen of the phone they can be hunching down to look at themselves. Instead of having a slight bend of a mirror-frame, the frame is bended bluntly, and so on. As with the first selfie, this image also would need a text which adds to and compliments the meaning of the image. Often the result of this work can be some version of culture jamming. In this case, the second selfie lands within the genre of parody, which shares many of the characteristics of Sherman´s selfies.

The particularly visible characteristics of the parody genre in the ´Covergirl´ selfie will provide the point of departure for the second thought-out selfie ´writing´ task. The ´Ahoy´ selfie would most likely provide equally rewarding reflective explorations, perhaps especially in relation to gender and media gender roles. However, as the scope of this chapter has its

limitations and because the ´Covergirl´ selfie has distinct properties both in terms of how it is manipulated and its use of text, it is chosen as the focus for this next suggested activity. Using this selfie as a framework, the pupils can create their own parody selfie keeping a close eye on how Sherman´s use of editing resources, camera angles, point of view and gaze. The pupils might have to be made aware of the intentionally poor editing such as the unconnected strands of hair and the ´blunder´ details such as the peeling sticker. This selfie also has a very interesting and intriguing background, where it looks as if a man in the background is peeing outside a privy. The overall background is also depicted in dull shades of colour. These details create a strong contrast to the magazine layout promising perfect style, beauty, and fashion. When the pupils create their own selfies based on this one, they can use their own lives and selfie practices as inspiration for the parody. They can thus ´make fun´ of their own representations which simultaneously can detach them from their own practices and put them in a critical light. Perhaps the pupils can become aware of being representing themselves in stereotypical ways, and the ´forced nature´ of the roles they step into. For backgrounds the pupils can get creative, searching for a setting which creates a strong contrast to what their text expresses. The caption of the selfie should underscore the parodic characteristics and as always, compliment the image.

Producing and writing selfies this way can provide the pupils with a deeper understanding of the selfie artworks and enhance critical awareness in how they construct their own identities online, and question what and who they look to when they do so and why. Beyond these suggestions, the selfie genres can be used several ways. One way could be to have the pupils choose freely from all the different genres and explore what new ways they potentially could enjoy expressing themselves in, while at the same time being critical as to why and to what purpose they would do so. This type of exploration and reflection could help young people be more mindful of how they choose to construct their identities online.

5.4   Choice and agency

Constructing identities are about making choices, which connects to the concept of agency.

Introducing pupils to visual literacy, which includes teaching them the skills of reading and producing images and multimodal texts with an imaginative, while at the same time critical mindset (Bamford, 2003, p. 5), provides them the ability to make informed choices. Working with Sherman and Ulman´s art and selfie genres can illustrate that there are options to choose from, and that different choices have different implications. The pupils can be explained the concepts of subjects, subject positions, and agency. These concepts can be illustrated by Sherman and Ulman´s examples as artists making choices that lead to a reinvention of subject positions. Ulman exemplifies how agency landed her a in new subject position detached from the given subject positions which she did not identify with. Sherman, being an already established artist, made a different kind of reinvention of her subject positions when she chose to open an account on Instagram. Her choice allowed her to produce art within the genre of selfies and share these in an ´authentic´ setting for selfies. It also allowed her to expose her art to a new and different audience. Sherman and Ulman can both be used as examples of how choosing new subject positions can provide professional opportunities and conscious identity constructions. The pupils can apply these examples to their own lives by referring to the work they embarked upon using visual literacy skills. That is not to say that conscious identity construction and ´activating´ agency is a simple equation to be solved. These issues are interwoven into the complexities of social interactions and roles, the needs of belonging to a group and the risks of standing out and should be addressed and reflected upon in class. Perhaps what is mostly important when introducing subject positions and agency, is that the pupils are made aware that there are options to choose from and choices to be made, and that experimenting with these positions can be rewarding, fun and give a deeper sense of being the captain of one´s own identity construction.

5.5   Conclusion

Instagram selfie art provides an excellent opportunity to work with a genre that pupils know well yet still might lack the skills to read and write beyond surface level. The selfie genre reflects how the concept of identity has changed from an essentialist concept of national belonging to a global belonging, in which the governing language is English. The selfie art

works of Ulman and Sherman can be used to relate identity construction to social media and to do so in a critical and informed way using visual literacy skills. Social media provides a predominant space for young people´s communication. It is a part of the Internet which provides an unprecedented amount of information and impulses related to cultures of all kinds. Young people´s identities are developed and influenced by social media as both producers and consumers. Their leading form of communication are through images and multimodal texts, which requires the skills to both read and produce images in a meaningful and critical way. How Internet and social media impact identity in children and youth, and their need for visual literacy to speak reasonably though images, should be acknowledged by the Ministry of Education and incorporated into the curriculum.

Working with selfie art using visual literacy tools provides one way for pupils to approach their own identity constructions in an informed and contemplative way. The issues reflected in the artists´ selfies can be used for pupils to look at their own self-representational practices and to critically evaluate their sources of inspiration. The pupils can develop their understanding of what social roles and stereotypes are and look at how these can influence their own identity construction. Introducing the pupils to selfie genres and artists whose uses of selfie genres are unconventional and creative, can provide pupils with options to choose from. The artists exemplify reinvention of subject positions and agency. These examples can educate pupils in seeing and choosing from a new point of view and create an appreciation for other people taking the risk and constructing themselves as something that goes against the tide. This kind of work is meant to be a part of their overall ´Bildung´ and an investment in their future ´selves´.

6. Conclusion thesis

The investigation in thesis has shown that implementing selfie art by Cindy Sherman and Amalia Ulman in ESL learning to critically approach identity construction and agency implies working with different disciplines and skills which can be useful and rewarding in many ways.

Firstly, to be able to read the selfie artworks and access the meaning of them beyond surface level, the pupils need visual literacy skills. Using these skills to decode and interpret the selfies by looking at the semantics and syntax provide the pupils with different angles from which to evaluate how identity constructions are made visible in the images and text. Having these skills, the pupils would also be able to approach the image-heavy social media discourse with a more critical and reflective outlook. For instance, being able to detect photo editing and stereotypical representations might influence who the pupils decide to get inspired by and dedicate their time to. Thus, they are more able to separate what is meaningful and necessary information for them, and what is not. Also, the pupils could benefit from having a deeper understanding of the effects photo manipulation and enhancing practices have. Photo manipulation in selfies can create a visual where the person behind it is the shape, so to speak. But it does not change the actual physical attributes of a person. Photo editing is not ´bad´ - it can be used to create immensely interesting and creative images. However, in self-enhancing practices it should be taken for what it is, which is an avatar, illusion, or at best – an interpretation of the person behind the camera.

Secondly, when the pupils read and understand images on a deeper level, they might also be equipped with the visual literacy skulls to write their own images in new and interesting ways, or at least question why they have chosen to construct themselves in a certain way. Writing selfies involves encoding and composing. Mastering these skills can open for new opportunities to explore not only the selfie genre, but also when composing all images and multimodal texts. For instance, creating writing using linguistic resources can be compared to ´creative imaging´ by using visual resources. Both can be immensely interesting, fun, and rewarding!

Thirdly, Global English is closely related to how pupils read selfies, listen to, speak, and address content online. Thus, it is important that Norwegian pupils practice and learn how to speak about these issues and influences in English, which can help them develop a

vocabulary of analytical and critical English. Being able to formulate critical reflections into English words can make them more confident when communicating these issues online.

Fourth, the pupils need to use reflective skills to understand, unveil and talk about identity construction and authenticity. Ulman´s hoax can be used as an example of someone who wants to oppose their given position within a discourse. It can also be used as an example that inspires pupils to choose differently than what they are expected to. That she chose to confront two different subject positions is an important point of the discussion. How many positions are we allowed to leave and where does that leave us? Sherman´s example can be used to mock have fun with stereotypical depictions in social media. The pupils can use her example to create parodies of their own selfie practices, be it self-enhancing practices, being at the gym or posing on a mountain top. Being creative and having fun with stereotypes can take the edge off them. It also creates an awareness of the filters and poses being resources that are used as opposed to practices that must be followed.

Last thoughts and further research

This thesis has explored the concepts of identity, truth, and agency in relation to young people, ESL learning and how they can be implemented didactically. The thesis is based on theory and the didactic suggestions have not been implemented in an actual classroom. Further research would entail working with pupils and teachers to see the response and learning outcome from implementing selfie artworks into the classroom. Also, further research on young people´s conception of identity and truth is needed to understand how to accommodate young people who have grown up in a digital world where identity and truth are in flux. Perhaps there is a need to reconsider what these concepts entail in contemporary life, and whether they have already been redefined.

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Appendix 1 **Cindy Sherman – questions for ´Ahoy´**

Who:

- Who is depicted in the selfie?

- Does she/he remind you of someone?

- Who do you think created the selfie and for what purpose?

Issues:

- What social role/gender role/stereotype is being shown in the selfie (both image and text)?

- How is the way the social role/stereotype similar or different to how you see this social role/stereotype in the media?

- Does it look like the person in the selfie is depicted *as* a stereotype, or acting out a social role?

- What does the selfie communicate about identity?

- What does the selfie say about identity construction and social media?

- What aspects of culture is the selfie communicating?

Information:

- What proportion of the selfie could be inaccurate?

- What information presented is factual/manipulated?

- If the selfie is manipulated – what is the ´evidence´ of manipulation (facial features, colours, background etc.)?

- How does the selfie interact with the audience using point of view, camera angle and gaze?

- What is the relationship between the image and the caption?

- What is the combined meaning of the image and the caption?

Persuasion:

- Why has Instagram been chosen to post the image?

- Why has this selfie been posted?

Appendix 2 **Cindy Sherman – questions for ´Ready for the Runway´**

Cindy Sherman´s selfie with the caption ´Ready for the Runway´

Who:

- Who is depicted in the selfie?

- Does she/he remind you of someone?

- Who do you think created the selfie and for what purpose?

Issues:

- What social role/gender role/stereotype is being shown in selfie (both image and text)?

- How is appearance depicted in the selfie?

- How is the way appearance is presented similar or different to how you see this depicted in social media?

- What does the selfie communicate about identity?

- What does the selfie say about identity construction and social media?

- What aspects of self-enhancement culture is the selfie communicating?

Information:

- What proportion of the selfie is inaccurate?

- What information presented is factual/manipulated?

- What is the ´evidence´ of manipulation? (facial features, colours, background etc.)

- How does the image interact with the audience using point of view, camera angle and gaze?

- What is the relationship between the image and the caption?

- What is the combined meaning of the image and the caption?

Persuasion:

- Why has Instagram been chosen to post the image?

- Why has this selfie been posted?

Appendix 3 Amalia Ulman – questions for both selfies

Who:

- Who is depicted in the selfie?

- Who is the intended audience for the selfie?

- Whose point of view does the selfie take?

- Who do you think created the selfie and for what purpose?

Issues:

- How are lifestyle/appearance/trends depicted in the picture?

- How is the way lifestyle/appearance/trends is presented similar or different to how you see this depicted in social media?

- What does the selfie communicate about authenticity?

- What does the selfie say about identity construction and social media?

- What aspects of social media culture is the selfie communicating?

Information:

- What proportion of the selfie is inaccurate?

- What information presented is factual/manipulated?

- If manipulated – what is the ´evidence´ of manipulation? (facial features, colours, background etc.)

- How does the image interact with the audience using point of view, camera angle and gaze?

- What is the relationship between the image and the caption?

- What is the combined meaning of the image and the caption?

Persuasion:

- Why has Instagram been chosen to post the image?

- Why has this selfie been posted?