The Empty Portrait

Encounters with a Photographer

Virginia Woods-Jack

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A b s t r a c t

The Empty Portrait forefronts a new experience of the portrait for all

participants involved: the photographer, the subject, and the viewer. Breaking

away from the camera, the materiality of the photograph, and the portrait as a

locus of identity are central aspects of this new experience. As it challenges the

relationship between photography and temporality, The Empty

Portrait attempts to blur the boundary between the photographic and cinematic

image, asking the viewer to look and contemplate further.

A c k n o w l e d g e m e n t s

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Figure 11, Julia Margaret Cameron. Sir John Herschel. 1867. Platinum print, tinted stock, 25.7 x 19.4 cm. Printed by A.L. Coburn, ca. 1915 from copy negative of original print.
From *Stillness and Time: Photography and the Moving Image* (p. 27), Green, D. & Lowry, J. (2006). Brighton: Photoworks.

Introductory Thoughts.

> " 'myself' never coincides with my image, for it is my image which is heavy,
>
> motionless, stubborn (which is why society sustains it), and 'myself' which is
>
> light, divided, dispersed: like a bottle-imp, 'myself' doesn't hold still, giggling in
>
> my jar: if only photography could give me a neutral, anatomic body, a body
>
> which signifies nothing!"
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> *Roland Barthes 1980 (Camera Lucida p.12)*

The face is a site for looking, a site for contemplation. The photographic portrait, in its simplest terms, is a record of the face. I will however argue that it is a somewhat unsatisfactory replacement for the time spent in the act of looking and its creation. *The Empty Portrait* puts forward a new notion of the portrait[1] blurring the boundary between the still photograph and the cinematic image, challenging the traditional relationship between photography and temporality[2]. By rearranging the triadic relationship between the photographer, the subject, and the viewer *The Empty Portrait* negotiates a new experience for all participants, with a prevailing desire to encourage a specific kind of looking.

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[1] A traditional frame of interpretation for a portrait is one that deals with the subjects' identity, something of who they are as a person, their personality etc The photographer aims to capture an image that will display something of the subjects' true self.

[2] This is a key term in my thesis and in this context is related to the relationship between photography and time. The traditional notion is that a photograph is the material proof of something that has happened, something that is inextricably linked to the past.

The process of making a photographic portrait involves the passage of time. The subject, with the skills of the photographer and technology of the camera, goes through a process of transformation from a living form to a material object. The end result provides the viewer with a finite and customarily singular view. From this image numerous readings may be initiated; the fleeting expression, once frozen in the photographic image, can become symbolic of a person. What becomes of the time though, the time of the experience within which the image was created? My journey, as recorded here, has been concerned with regaining this lost time, with creating for the viewer a time in which they can look and contemplate. In so doing, I attempt to relocate the portrait, and primarily the face of the unknown subject, into an arena of observation and consideration as opposed to one of representation and identity.

Both in the context of my practice, and within this thesis, there exists an imperative need to consider, challenge, disassemble and rearrange the triadic relationship within photography. This triad consists, in short, of the photographer, their subject and the viewer. This line of enquiry will be examined in part via the writings of Roland Barthes. I will also present photographic examples which have, in my estimation, successfully challenged the triad. These include key works by Jeff Wall and Roni Horn, and my own experiments.

Many theorists have emphatically placed the photograph in the past tense, a finite

record of something that has passed. Time proceeds onwards opening up an ever-widening gap between the time of creation and the time of viewing. However, I will outline how throughout the history of photography, there have been examples where the image has effortlessly placed itself in a less absolute or disconsolate relationship to temporality. More specifically, I am describing a mode of temporality in which the time of the image is experienced more in relation to a state of becoming. Expanding the temporal boundaries of the photograph allows me to examine and consider the photograph through an approach more affiliated with the moving image as opposed to the still image.

Departing from the material object of the photograph has placed new demands and far reaching questions in relation to production and presentation in the forefront of my practice. I will attempt to outline the new considerations and specificities involved in the production of the final piece and the corresponding theoretical justifications for the projection screen as the new site for my practice.

The "unfreezing" of the photographic image has returned my work to a place that is very familiar to me. My aim is to create or recreate a place where any tangible relationship to time is lost, the future or the past of the experience are immaterial, it is rather the role of the constant "becoming" of the piece to ask the viewer to look and contemplate further.

I Am Looking at You.

The fascination I have with the human face has been lifelong. As a child I was raised in a small English village, the kind of community where everyone knew each other. Every face arrived with both a story and a context. As a young teenager I would take any opportunity to travel to the surrounding towns, affording me the opportunity to gaze upon the faces of people whom I did not know. These faces appeared like silent movies without a narrative to guide my interpretations. I would sit for hours just looking and watching. The considerable pleasure I gleaned from this experience involved being able to ponder and speculate about who the person was behind the face. The ambiguity we can find in the face of a stranger, when they are removed from their own contexts and personal narratives, offers a departure point for creative thought. This ambiguity offered possibilities and became my actual point of interest as opposed to the realisation or reconciliation of these possibilities.

The artist who chooses the face as the locus for their practice does so for reasons that are specific to them and might never be divulged to the viewer. The faces I choose to turn my gaze upon also become a mirror to myself. I reveal something of myself through whom I choose to depict, as the faces seen and recorded also become the faces that gaze back at me.

My preliminary studies were an exploration into what we notice and observe when we take the time to stop and look at ourselves. In brief, the subjects engaged with their own reflection in a mirror for approximately five minutes, I recorded this engagement by photographing their reflection. The subjects were then asked to record any thoughts or feelings that came to mind during the shoot. In very general terms the results were visually pleasing (see Figures 1&2) and the texts were quite revealing and in some cases somewhat poetic. As the photographer I ensured my reflection was not visible to myself in the mirror during the shoots. My presumption was that the subjects' engagement was with their own reflection not my presence; in retrospect this was somewhat naive on my part.
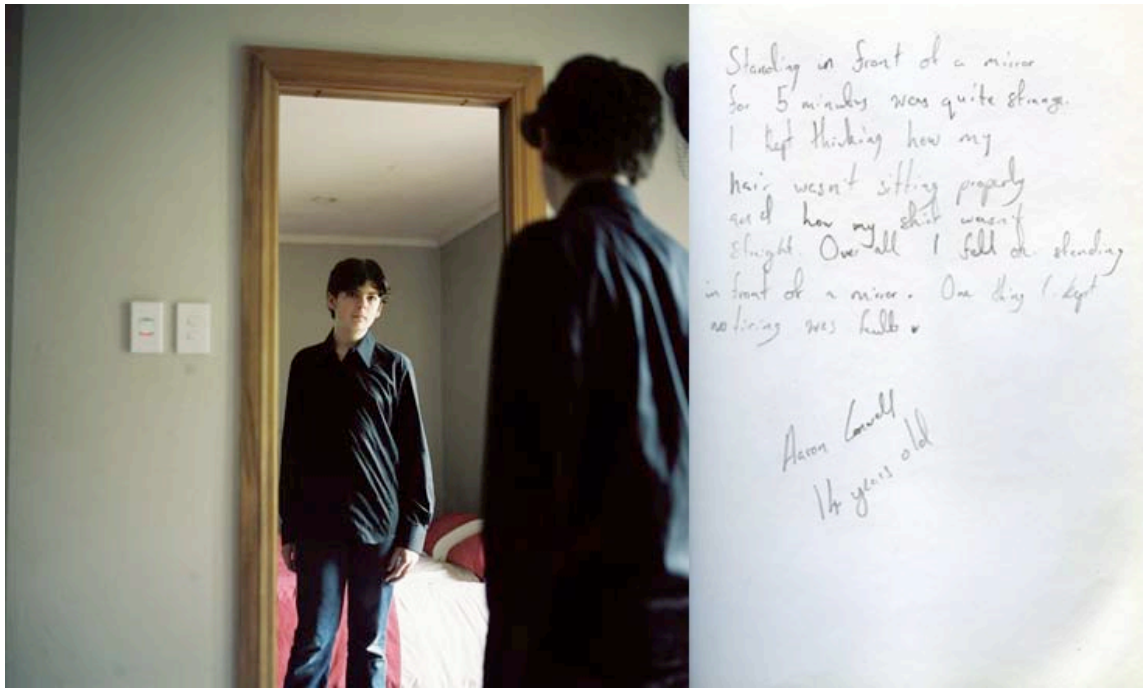
Figure 1. Virginia Woods-Jack. Aaron Gazing. 2007 Photograph and sketchbook insert.
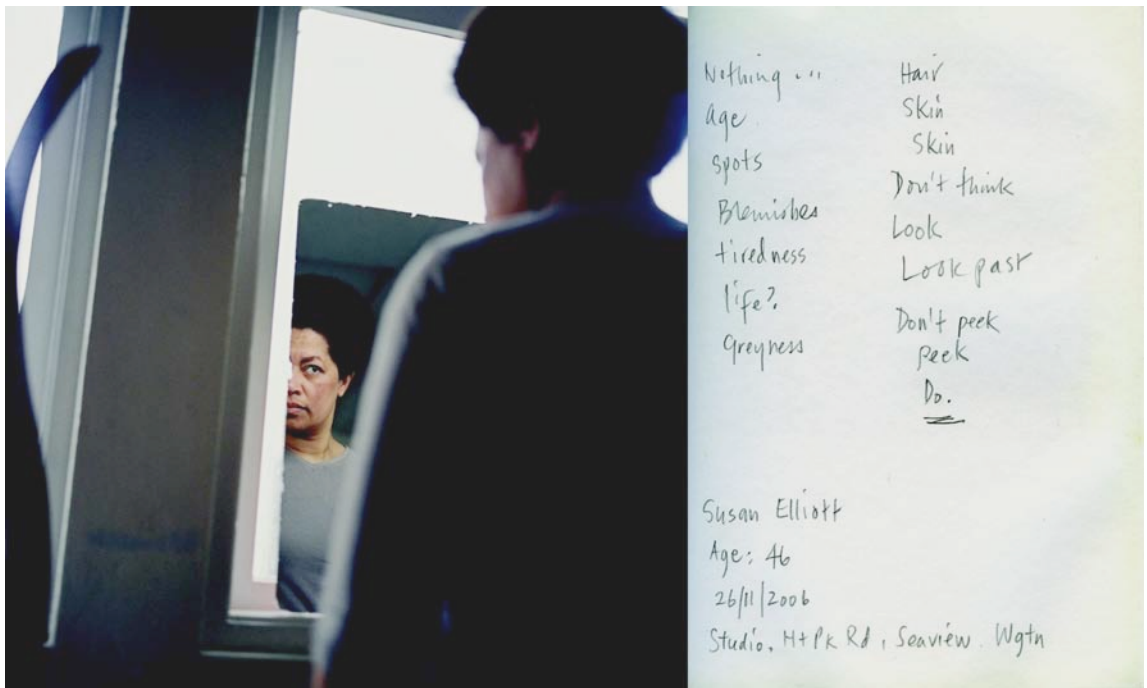
Figure 2. Virginia Woods-Jack. Susan Gazing. 2007 Photograph and sketchbook insert.

As a means of challenging my assumptions regarding the concepts I was exploring, and as a matter of interest, I asked a friend to photograph me in the same manner. The only visual rule was that the final image should not include his reflection. It was only on taking up the position of the subject that I became aware that the presence of the photographer, in the mirror, was omnipresent. Instead of engaging deeply with my own reflection, the mirror played a very different role. The mirror offered the opportunity to control my pose and therefore the image I portrayed, which the camera would then record. It was both fascinating and surprising that none of the subjects had mentioned my presence in the mirror, either during the shoots or in their texts and how or if this had affected what they had seen or what they had presented to the camera.

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes discusses the notion of transforming ourselves "ahead of time" into an image when we are aware of being photographed (Barthes, 1981, p. 10). The portrait photograph in Barthes' opinion is made up of four differing and antithetical perspectives, all of which are subconsciously and consciously at play in the mind of the subject and the photographer. As the subject in front of the camera we are in the process of transformation from a subject (living form) to an object (the material photograph). The aspirations during this process are that "In front of the lens, I am at the same time: [1] the one I think I am, [2] the one I want others to think I am, [3] the one the photographer thinks I am and [4] the one he makes use of to exhibit his art." Barthes describes the disquiet he feels for how

the image will be received and perceived within the public domain, and resigns

himself to the fact that the object his image has become will be at the mercy of many

readings (1981, pp. 13-14).

This disquiet and ultimate resignation that Barthes describes is, in my opinion, a

major point of conflict within the triadic relationship and can be felt by the

photographer as well as the subject. The triad could be described as a dialectical

relationship; in this instance we have three participants. As is typical of the

dialectical relationship all participants share at least some meanings and fundamental

interpretations in common, however the intentions behind the image compared to the

readings can widely differ. The prevailing disparity in this relationship is that once

the image has been created the dialogue between the participants is typically silent.

This three-way relationship is grounded in the image, the living subject of the

portrait transformed into a mute material object. The viewer then creates an

interpretation based on visible content (the subject), how the content is presented

(the photographer), all framed within the context of who they are (the viewer). The

inherent muteness of the image both creates and facilitates this process. The

photographer is restrained in their ability to clarify their intention, but more

importantly, the subject, in their classification and reading, is denied any form of

recourse.

My next experiment was singular and in direct relation to both Barthes' writings and my own concerns with the triad. As an approach to exploring the breaking down or redefining of this long standing tripartite relationship, I employed a composition inspired by Canadian photographer Jeff Wall's image (Fig. 3) "Pictures for Women".

Figure 3. Jeff Wall. Picture for Women. 1979. Transparency in light box, 1425 x 2045 mm. Collection of the artist. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

This was a sensorial experiment (Fig. 4) with the subject and myself conveying how different approaches to both looking and being looked at, through the mirror, affected how we interacted and acted in front of the camera. The salient difference for both my subjects and me was when I came out from behind the camera and looked at them directly in the mirror (Fig. 5). The subject noted that they felt they were being looked at by <u>me</u> more than by the camera. I also noted a shift in the role of the camera; instead of the <u>camera</u> justifying and facilitating my desire to look at people, the mirror was now the intermediary. The cameras' role was in this arrangement was to simply record the interplay of looking. The significant result

from these experiments was the act of becoming one step closer to granting agency

to my own gaze, my own desire to look. The idea of the camera having its own

autonomous view, separate from my view and that of the subjects, raised a new

concept. A shift in the perceived view or role of the camera can also shift the

position and role of the viewer.

Figure 4. Virginia Woods-Jack. MFA experiments x4 from sketchbook. 2008.

Figure 5. Virginia Woods-Jack. MFA experiments from sketchbook. 2008

She is Looking at Her.

You Are The Weather by artist Roni Horn (Fig. 6) disassembles or rearranges the

triadic relationship common to traditional portraiture.

Figure. 6. Roni Horn. You Are The Weather (detail). 1994-95. Photo Installation of 100 photographs installed on 4 walls. 64 chromogenic and 36 gelatin-silver prints. Each image is 26.5 x 21.4 cm.

The work in its 100 representations of a single face, taken from similar angles and spanning a six week period, can be seen as a comment on the multiple layers of identity. However Thierry de Duve, the Belgian art theorist, offers an interpretation resonant with my own enquiries. He interprets *You Are The Weather* as an interplay of address, where the subject is merely attending to the fact that she is being addressed. Margrét is responding to the scopic demands of the artist with a look that seems to be asking, "what do you want of me?" (Horn, 2000, p. 83). Let me explain in further detail my own position here and why it was so important.

My primary concern here involves how the triad of the photographer, subject and viewer takes on a new perspective. It is my contention that when the subject of a portrait directly engages with the camera's lens the photographer is privileging the position of the viewer. The viewer is afforded the same engagement with the gaze as the photographer has seen through the cameras' lens. The viewer occupies the position of the camera in the viewing of the final image, and the photographer becomes close to invisible. The interaction appears to become one between the viewer and the subject. However, as outlined earlier this interaction can be somewhat flawed, the subject has become an object and is open to classification and readings based on visual knowledge and cultural interpretation. De Duve describes how, as the viewer in *You Are The Weather*, instead of feeling that we are being afforded the position of looking directly at the subject, we are left with the feeling that the subject is looking straight through the camera (the viewer) to Horn (2000, p.

83). This altering of the position of the viewer, the breaking down of the traditional rules of the triad shifted *You Are The Weather*, in my mind, from being about portraiture to being about the process of looking. Had Horn only shown one image of Margrét the traditional interplay of the triad would have remained intact. We know or presume that Horn is looking through the lens at Margrét, however the multitude of images and their similarity in position and crop make the camera seem invisible, not Horn.

Simply Looking at Each Other

The experiments that proceeded were twofold. They explore this shifting role of the camera, thus the viewer, in conjunction with continuing attempts to grant further agency to the act of looking. The first set of experiments involved two digital cameras with the shutters synchronised to open at the same time at set intervals for a specific period of time. One camera was focused on me and the other on my chosen subject. The images became immaterial, overwhelmed by the intrusive technology present during the shoots. However it highlighted the fact that even though the camera's view was to be autonomous there was still the necessity for me to control when the camera made its record.

The second sets of experiments were very simple and involved sitting with my subject in close proximity and looking at each other without any elaboration. The

camera was positioned either to my left or right and I held a cable release. I decided to only shoot one roll of film so as not to break the duration of the gaze. This decision meant that there would only be twelve frames remaining from any one encounter. I decided at this point to return to the preference of my youth and chose to work with strangers. I could then gaze at them without truly knowing, I could discover someone in a visual context.

Georg Simmel's 1908 essay *The Stranger* sets out the essential dynamics of the "stranger relationship". Simmel was one of the first generation of German Sociologists and pioneered the concept of social structure. One of the vital components of the stranger relationship is, in Simmel's view, the fact that the relationship is imbued with, and enhanced by, objectivity. I found that within my photographic encounters this objectivity was experienced more akin to a neutrality Simmel counters the presumption that this objectivity brings with it an assumed level of detachment or non-participation, rather his observations found that it allowed for a "positive and definite kind of participation" (2003, p. 105). I found this to be concurrent with the encounters I had with my subjects, however I feel this was in equal part due to the fact I have come out from behind the camera. The subjects are able to examine me, look at me as opposed to just being looked at by me through the camera. Like Simmel I believe that all elements of the encounter are facilitated by the knowledge that the encounter will be fleeting. In the small amount of time we spend together my subjects and I are able to assess each other within the

context of simply looking. The strangeness of the interaction, the time we spend together, typifies the relationship of remoteness and closeness as discussed by Simmel in his essay. We are remain remote, as there is no requesting for or divulging of any personal information, and at the same time we are close as the act of looking at one another, with little or no conversation, is seemingly an intimate act.

With the camera no longer mediating the space between myself and the subject and the focus being purely on looking at one another, an unexpected aspect emerged. There was a new stillness a sense of time where we were absorbed in the situation. It was not simply a case of who held the gaze longest, as the twelve frames determined the duration, but rather a slowing down and quietude spent in the act of looking. The frames were taken intuitively with no specific time frame in mind. However conveying the duration and the slowing down, as experienced in the photographic encounters, became an important component when determining the presentation of the work because of my desire to encourage a specific kind of looking.

A b o u t   F a c e

Barthes' thoughts on the interplay of aspirations when in front of a camera contributed to the initial presentation of the work as a diptych.   I was invited to include three pieces in the exhibition About Face at Enjoy Gallery, Wellington in July 2008.

Figure 7. Virginia Woods-Jack. Anna. 2008. Archival ink jet print on dibond, 100 x 50 cm.

The diptychs consist of one image chosen by me and one by the subject and was a

conscious reference to Barthes thoughts on the four differing and antithetical

perspectives that are at play in the producing of a photographic portrait as

discussed earlier (see p. 7). My photographic subject and I made our choices

independently so as not to affect each other's selection process or criteria,

nonetheless the image choice was always different (see Fig. 7).

One result of the noted stillness during the shoots was that the pose and expression

only seemed to alter minutely across the 12 frames. With the diptychs I was aware

that, on an initial glance, the viewer might presume that they were looking at nothing

more than a mirror image and may then look away. One problem with all art, and

photography more so with its prolific use within media, is how to encourage the

viewer to stop and look. My desire was that the viewer with the more curious eye

would take on something akin to a performative[3] role with the works. The uncanny

feeling that the images were not identical would draw them in. The performance

would start with a registering of the subtle differences; this in turn would encourage

the viewer to approach the work for closer inspection, taking on a position of

viewing similar to that of the camera. From this position the viewer can observe, but

not participate in, the dialogical space between myself and the subject, which

remains intact. The viewer would essentially assume the role of 'looking on' as did

the camera.

The main benefit of exhibiting the work at this stage in my research was, once in the

public domain the work was reviewed. The review put forward by the Dominion

Post art critic Mark Amery, was perhaps a more traditional interpretation in keeping

with the limitations and concerns surrounding the photo portrait.

> Virginia Woods-Jack provides twinned images of her subjects, one taken
>
> straight after the other. With the difference between shots being extremely
>
> subtle you're led to consider how powerful the smallest change in pose and
>
> gaze is to our view of a person, and thus how false that stilled impression can
>
> be. Looking slightly away from camera, these subjects suggest a familiarity
>
> with the photographer, but as with Hahn's work retain in their movement a
>
> control of their own image. (Amery, 2008, p. D2)

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[3] When I refer to performance/performative it is not in the context of performance art
where the artist is the piece, or performing arts where there are actors and an audience,
rather I use this word in terms of how the viewer interacts with the work, the mode of
looking I am attempting to evoke.

I found it interesting that there was a presumed familiarity between myself and the subjects due to their averted gaze. The review, as a whole, brought to the fore a number of points. It reinforced how important the viewer is in the construction of meaning, particularly in the absence of any descriptive texts. The second point was more of a personal realisation, that even though it was important to utilise strangers for the production of these works it was not vital to the reading of the work.

From Fleeting Glance to Looking

My interest in the face and the portrait is not one of revelation; it is one of stimulating the visual faculty. For my own part the face offers this possibility and for this reason alone the portrait should also. I believe that giving oneself over to the act of looking can produce untold thoughts that one may consider and draw upon. For thoughts to be stimulated the fleeting glance has to be drawn out to have the durational qualities associated with looking, gazing[4]. From that point looking can then enter into a reciprocal relationship with contemplation, working in tandem, advancing together.

Duration permeates through my practice; in the photographic encounters time is spent in both the gaze and the length of the pose. However the duration seeps into

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[4] For purposes of clarification I believe it is worthwhile offering a dictionary definition of these two terms – I will use the Merriam Webster Online definitions here.
To Gaze – to fix eyes in a steady intent look, often with eagerness or studious intention.
To Look – to exercise the power of vision upon, to examine.

the works and could be likened to a performance that places demands on all parties. As mentioned earlier the nature of the gaze experienced in the photographic shoots brings with it a sensation of the slowing down of time and living in the moment. The 12 frames recorded by the camera encompass the unfolding of time taken in this performance. As individual photographic frames, singular views, the work succumbs to Barthes well documented thoughts on the photograph being an immobilisation or arresting of time, inextricably linked to the past (Barthes, 1981). It was at this juncture in my research that the focal point became breaking apart this immobilisation in order to reveal the duration of the performance.

In *Time Exposure and the Snap Shot* Thierry de Duve challenges the traditional singular view offered by Barthes. De Duve separates the photograph, and his argument, into two categories which he refers to as the "snapshot" and the "time exposure" (2007, p.109). Neither of De Duve's categories refers to the length of time that it took to produce the image, as contemporary photography is capable of being instantaneous. De Duve's notion of time in relation to the photograph is defined as a quality that is present in, or can springboard from, the image. The significance, in relation to my work, was that De Duve highlights the posture or the pose as being the key indicator in defining the two categories.

De Duve defines the *snapshot* as an image that portrays a natural movement that has been halted, frozen in that instant and stolen from its natural conclusion. A

photograph of a person caught in mid air jumping into a swimming pool can serve as an example of this. In this type of image we are presented with an "impossible posture" that we can't experience visually with our own eyes in real time (2007, p. 110). The *time exposure*, for which de Duve holds up the portrait as the perfect example, holds a very different relationship to time. De Duve does not deny that a portrait is a referent to the past but unlike the snapshot, which provides us with a suspended moment we cannot see with our own eyes, the time exposure has continuity to the nature of seeing. It is precisely this continuity which "liberates an autonomous and recurrent temporality, which is the time of remembrance" (2007, p. 113). The subject, as object, is liberated from its specific moment of construction, privileging the viewer with the opportunity to think of time outside of the frame of the image and thus offers "the possibility of staging that life again and again" (2007, p. 113). I interpret this as the viewer having an experience with the image where they do not just look and see rather they looked and considered, they thought of time outside of the confines of the image.

G r o w i n g   i n t o   t h e   p i c t u r e .

Early photographic portraits with their aesthetic of quiescence were a product of the technical limitations of the time, namely the long exposures required due to the low light sensitivity of the early plates. I have little in common with these technological limitations; I am working with a modern camera and roll film as opposed to plates or

sheet film. The commonality was the seemingly recurrent detail of the duration of the pose. The sitter in the early 1900s was made aware of the need to maintain quiet concentration and a statuesque stillness whilst their photograph was being taken. The quiet contemplation and stillness present in my encounters, it would appear, is a consequence of sitting face to face and observing one another.   We experience each other within a visual context, framed within a time limited by the 12 frames, one roll of film.

Walter Benjamin in *A Small History of Photography* describes the experience of the sitters in these early photographs so vividly. In his words the subject is led to "focus his life in the moment rather than hurrying on past it (...) the subject, as it were grew into the picture" (Benjamin, 1979, p. 245). The single image, located within the historical frame work of the time of its making, eloquently and effortlessly placed itself in a mode of temporality. Benjamin believed this quality was lost as soon as technology made photography more instantaneous.

Hiroshi Sugimoto's series *Theatres* (1978 - present) offers a contemporary example of the visibility of time within the singular photographic image. Dr. Hans Belting in his essay *The Theater of Illusion*, which accompanies the published works, defines the quality of time in Sugimoto's images in the following terms. "The time event, as is the movie, dissolves into a time space where many sediments of time remembered are buried in a simultaneous view" (Sugimoto, 2000, p. 10). The empty movie

screen illuminating the cavernous theatre is actually the result of the shutter

remaining open for the duration of the film. As the viewer of the photograph we see

nothing of the film, yet we know it has been there throughout the making of the

photograph, image after image at 24 frames a second (see Figure 8). This idea of one

image being the outcome of a multitude of images, an accumulated view led me to the

layering experiments.

Figure 8. Hiroshi Sugimoto. Radio City Music Hall, New York. 1978. Gelatin silver print, 50.7 x 63.2 cm

Giving Way to Blurring

For the layering experiments I took the twelve individual frames, which encompass

the time spent in the encounters, and layered them, one on top of the other. The 12

frames that had individually marked out a passage of time were then transformed

when viewed as a totality within the singular image. As the layers merged, the crisp

clean edges and fine detail gave way to a blurring; the image was reviving the

experience with the addition of every layer (see figure 9&10). This new layered,

simultaneous view brought a visibility to the accumulation of time.

During the photographic interaction the eyes had been the point of focus for the

subject and me, this was how we engaged, and therefore it was important to anchor

the layers to the eyes. Giving the image this anchor brought a tangible visibility to

the peripheral movement which was invisible in the single images. The slight

blurring of the edges does not register as a sign of movement due to the residual

clarity in the eyes. Through the blurring a depth enters the images that had been

absent in the 12 autonomous views.

Figure 9. Virginia Woods-Jack. Josh layering experiment. 2008

Figure 10. Virginia Woods-Jack. Holly layering experiments. 2008

The slightly ambiguous visual quality of the layered images drew me back to the

early photographic portraits and in particular a reading by Mary Ann Doane, which

responded to a work by Julia Margaret Cameron (see Figure 11).

> "(The) soft focus and attentiveness to the complex features, particularly
>
> the liquid eyes of the subject, invites extended contemplation. Time is
>
> written into the image and it promises *more* to the studious gaze. It is as
>
> if there were a depth to which the stillness of the face gives access, but
>
> only through the expenditure of time" (*Stillness and Time*, 2006, p. 28).

The time taken in the encounters, the making of the image, was finally surfacing as a

visible quality. However I felt the presentation of the piece as an actual experience

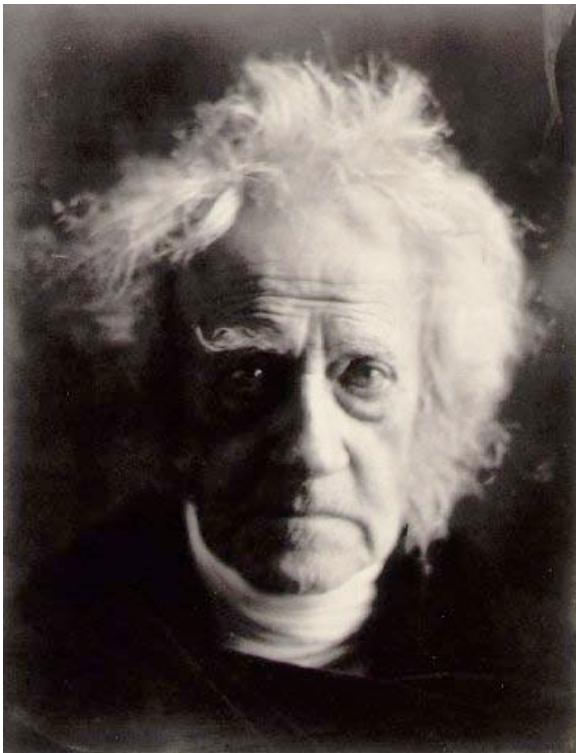of looking was still proving to be elusive.

Figure 11. Julia Margaret Cameron. Sir John Herschel. 1867. Platinum print, tinted stock, 25.7 x 19.4 cm. Printed by A.L. Coburn, ca. 1915 from copy negative of original print.

A v e r t e d   E y e s

 In Peter Hutchings essay *Through a Fishwife's eyes - Between Benjamin and Deleuze on the Timely Image* there is an interesting discussion of temporality within photography. Hutchings takes up Benjamin's notion of duration within portraiture. Similar to Benjamin, Hutchings felt that, "time leached" into the image due the length of the exposures (Hutchings, 2001, p. 110). Yet again it was Hutchings' thoughts on the poses employed by the sitter that resonated with my practice. Hutchings notes how in early portraits it was common for the sitter to adopt a pose typified by averted eyes. Once put in a historical setting the reasoning for this pose is quite obvious. Both class and gender would have come into play as it would have been unthinkable, for the female sitter in particular, to look directly at a stranger and his camera (2001, p. 119).

In a contemporary setting from which we view these images, Hutchings describes how the averted eyes prevent any direct encounter between the subject and the viewer. He describes this encounter as one that would be finite yet impossible, there are no "exchanged glances, of communication across time" (2001, p. 123). Throughout my photographic experiments a constant motif has been the averted eyes; however the gaze of my subject is engaged, they are looking at me, which differs from the gaze Hutchings is describing. It is common in contemporary portraiture for the subject of the portrait to be looking straight down the lens of the

camera. We have all experienced the feeling of being "eyeballed" by a portrait; the experience can be somewhat of an unfeasible confrontation between the viewer and the portrait.   In my work there is a positive consequence for the viewer being unable to directly engage with the gaze of the subject, this mute image. The subject's gaze remains undisturbed, it is engaged with me. The encounter the viewer experiences is one between me and the subject, they are on lookers, observers. The viewer can look without being looked at, which in my mind allows and encourages the viewer to look on and on.

Molding the Space Between Us

It was the Peter Hutching's reading that introduced the consideration of photography alongside, and contradictory to, notions of duration within cinema. Hutchings included a quote from Gilles Deleuze citing André Bazin which outlines two key elements specific to the ontologies of photography and cinema and to my argument. Whilst reading this quote outlining a key point of difference between the two mediums my work started to reveal itself as somewhat of a conjunction of the two.

Allow me to breakdown with more clarification how this came about. In *Cinema 1* a seminal writing on the philosophy of the cinematic image Gilles Deleuze outlines what he called the "movement image". Hutchings breaks this term down very simply into terms of an image IN movement not simply OF movement (Hutchings, 2001,

p.123). Deleuze outlines photography as a kind of "molding" where the photographer organises elements to the point of balance and, that when this is achieved, the opening and closing of the shutter then captures that single instant and transforms it into an "immobile" section of time (1983, cited in Hutchings, 2001, p. 123). I do not believe it was Deleuze's intention to separate the photographer from the camera, as it wasn't the nature of his enquiry, but his distinction between the two stood out to me in relation to my own departure from looking through the camera. I stated earlier that I take the frames intuitively which I still stand by, however Deleuze's comments on the point of balance being the impetus to close the shutter led me look at how I am aware of this "point of balance" when I am distanced from the cameras view.

During the act of looking into the subject's eyes I am in essence looking at, or seeing how, someone looks at me; we are "molding" the space between us and when I see something familiar to me, in them, that is when the frame is taken. The photograph is then an immobile moment and it is this immobility that places the photographic image within the realms of the past tense, an index of a moment that has been and never will be again. In my work we know we are looking at a constructed moment that has been framed by the cameras' lens however the key distinction is that the moment was not constructed for the lens but rather for the encounter. Deleuze goes on to quote André Bazin the French theorist who points to how photography contrasts with cinema. Bazin tell us that unlike photography, cinema "realises the

paradox of molding itself on the time of the object and of taking the imprint of its duration as well" (1970, cited by Hutchings, 2001, p.123). When I read this it raised two points, in the first instance of the time taken in the photographic encounter where we are experiencing each other visually. More importantly however, the second point was a sense of this time being reconstructed and revived whilst I was constructing the layered images. I was able to review and revisit the encounter with a feeling of duration, albeit limited at that stage to the process of accumulating the layers into a singular image on the computer screen.

T i m e   L e a c h e d   O u t

Moving through the layers of the composite images, seeing them come in one by one, dissolving into one another and creating a new image was in essence rebuilding the encounter of the subject looking at me. The slight shift in view that every new layer offered reanimated the experience of looking. This initiated a radical shift in how I approached the work. It signaled a departure from the materiality of the photograph with the work instead emerging as a time-based piece. The encounter was still recorded photographically but would not be experienced as a material object that is a physical testament to something that *has* happened. There was now the conceivable thought that the viewer would be able encounter the work as an unfolding of time, mapping the time taken looking during the interactions.

Once I started exploring the notion of unfolding the duration in the work I had to question why I was resistant to move into video portraiture. In the video portrait we are presented with the liberation from the truly static image, yet many contemporary practitioners (Fiona Tann and Thomas Struth amongst others) choose to pose the subject with the quiescence inherent in the photographic portrait. We are presented with the impression of time standing still without actual immobility. We see a portrait suspended yet still present in its natural continuum of time. We know we are watching a film; the subjects are still but there is the natural movement of life in the subjects and their surroundings.

Noel Carroll in his essay *Towards an Ontology of the Moving Image* outlines what he calls the "profound difference" (1985, p.73) between a film without motion and a projection of a slide; he uses the face as the locus for his argument. Caroll states, "for as long as you know that what you are watching is a film, even a film of what appears to be a photograph, it is always justifiable to expect that the image might move" (1985, p.73). I will borrow Carroll's example of Chris Markers *La Jetée 1962* to highlight his point. The images in *La Jetée* are singular they offer differing views and content. One image after the other they build the story, one follows directly and logically from the other constructing the narrative of the piece. The characters, the narrator and the soundtrack drive the films' narrative forward. Importantly the viewer is also offered a more focused view of certain images, they are panned across or zoomed in or out on. We experience *La Jetée* as a film and there is always the

expectation that something may move.

The other side of Carroll's argument is that "if you know you are watching a slide then it is categorically impossible that the image should move" (1985, p.73). A traditional example of a slide show offers singular images which differ in content which was also true of *La Jetée*, however the view is static, there is no zooming in on specific areas to highlight or focus the viewer, there is also no panning round the shot. The viewer expects to see one image, then another and so on, there is no expectation that the image will move. For this I will use the example of Nan Goldin's *Ballad of Sexual Dependency*. In its original format it was shown as a slide show, comprising of 690 slides with a sound track and lasting for 45 minutes. The viewer was taken on a visual journey with strong narrative threads running throughout. Characters appeared, reappeared and in some cases disappeared, there was a musical sound track, all qualities utilised and inherent in motion pictures, but at no point did the viewer expect the images themselves to move. The viewer always knew they were looking at a slide show of still photographs.

Carroll's argument, in my view, centres around the natural expectations of the viewer based on the separate ontologies of the photographic and moving images. However I was curious to explore whether in the need to define the differences as an expectation of movement or lack of, it is disregarding a point where time can open up in the photographic image and the two mediums could meet.

The narrative in my work, if there is any at all, is one related to both temporality and looking. In the accumulated image we are offered a singular view made up of layers of the individual views. The camera's eye can only see in instants, finite and singular visions. In contrast the human eye has a sense of vision which is more active; our eyes are constantly updating the information, offering a seamless transition from one image to another, even if what we are viewing is essentially still.

Within my work there is a passage of time, not on a grand scale where the subject will age and herald this passage but rather a re-presentation of a brief period of time spent with a relative stranger. For this passage to be visible, the space between the images, the lost time between these autonomous views had to be recovered. In order for the viewer to encounter the work as an experience their vision required activating. The piece had to provide a cohesive and unbroken transition from one layer to another, steadily reviving itself in an experience more akin to that of the human eye.

From a research-based perspective, the natural progression for the work was this move to presenting the results as a time-based piece. Nevertheless the shift in my approach to the images and how they would be presented and received was sizeable. I had always been able to define my work in terms of photography and now this term seemed inadequate yet film also seemed inappropriate. I started using the term

'moving still' as it seemed more fitting.

The layering of the images one on of top of the other using cinematic technology brought the duration of the experience to the fore. When the piece was thought of in terms of 12 photographic images the lost time in-between the frames had been insistent in its absence. The introduction of a time line and long dissolves between the images filled in the time and at the same time made its presence invisible. This is not simply moving from one distinct singular view to another; the image evolves into a new view with the accumulation of all the images that came before embedded therein. The evolving nature of the piece as the layers appear also highlights the slowing down and quietude that echoes the sensation of looking during the photo shoots. The changes between the layers as they come into visibility are subtle, we know something is changing and continuing to keep the eyes of the subject as the anchor offers an initial point of entry for the viewer. From this anchor the eye then becomes aware that the rest of the image is in flux. A slight change in the expression of the mouth or position of the head that is never fully resolved. The layering of the images with their opacity at less than 100% provides the viewer with the accumulated view of the experience, and then the layers dissolve away again. The work demands duration from the viewer, enough to attempt to elicit a curiosity in the viewer. There may be the expectation that something may happen; yet ultimately all that is being revealed is the original act of looking.

Much the same as the mirror and the camera, considering the monitor screen as the location for the piece felt like a barrier, it stood between the encounter, and provided an unsatisfactory and indirect viewing experience. The piece had to be more visceral and David Green's essay *The Visibility of Time* on the work of the artist David Claerbout offers the projected photographic image as having a very different relationship to time compared to the material object of the photograph. His point of entry is that "the projected image is in a continual process of being reconstituted" (Green, 2004, p. 40) echoing earlier discussions of how our eyes interpret what we see. Light gives visibility to everything we are able to see and is at the core of how a photograph is made. Green points out "(the projected image) Dependent upon the continuous supply of artificial illumination, it is always 'live' " (Green, 2004, p. 40).

Experiments with projecting the 'moving stills' straight onto the wall brought with them a solidity that was counterproductive to experiencing the work. It seemed futile to have taken so many steps away from the photographic print, which is traditionally hung on a wall, to return to the wall so rapidly. I also found that the surface of the wall flattened the work in a similar fashion to the photographic print. Seeing the works back projected onto suspended screens offered a different experience again, it opened up the image in the space. The suspended 'moving stills' took on a presence of their own, they encouraged the viewer to approach them, to

look at them; they also seemed to be a part of the space, in the space.

Moving the work into a timeline and onto the projection screen brought with it new considerations. When the work was purely photographic in its production and presentation the location of the subject was of little or no consequence during the shoots, or in the final images. The main focus had been looking at each other regardless of where the looking took place; however the location took on a new importance in order for the work to be able to open up within the projection. A number of the initial works had been shot with the subjects close to a wall with no depth to the background. This choice of location had been successful in the photographic layering but produced a restricted and solidified view in the projections, very similar to projecting straight onto the wall. The pieces that seemed to seep into the site were the pieces in which there was a depth to the space behind the subject. I noted how such details as when there was a window in the background the continuous source of light from the projector took on the luminance of the sun. All of these considerations brought about a new way of thinking. There has always been a performative element to the work mainly in the original interaction however now the performative possibilities of the piece were presenting themselves and needed to be taken into consideration at all stages of the production of the pieces.

In the initial works the images were considered as individuals, they would stand-alone or at most be segments in a series. I was aware of the limitations surrounding

them due to the intrinsic nature of the photograph and how it is presented, received and read as already discussed. My point here is that at the commencement of this research all of the parts were considered through the lens of photography and now they were being considered through a lens more analogous to cinematography. The following quote by Vivian Sobchack illustrates perfectly my new position.

> Although dependent upon the photographic, the cinematic has something more to do with life, with the accumulation – not the loss – of experience. Cinematic technology *animates* the photographic and reconstitutes its visibility and verisimilitude in a difference not of degree but of kind. The moving picture is a visible representation not of activity finished or past but of activity coming-into-being (Sobchack, 1994, pp. 93-94).

Every still is now seen and produced with its role redefined. The photographic image in my work is no longer concrete and singular it now grows through additions and is an unresolved and transitional view freed from the constraints to which it was so strongly bound.

C o n c l u d i n g   T h o u g h t s .

In reaction to Harold Rosenberg's influential writing *The Tradition of the New (1959)* Mary McCarthy wrote, "You cannot hang an event on a wall, only a picture" (1978,

cited in De Duve, Time Exposure and Snapshot, 2007, p. 109). This is a most appropriate comment that I have held in consideration throughout my research. When asked by my primary supervisor Ann Shelton to spontaneously verbalise three key elements in my work I could offer two, experience and looking, both of which have driven the research forward. I have explored the possibilities that appear when the artist breaks down the traditional tripartite relationship in the photographic portrait. Stimulating the visual faculty challenges the viewer to have a new relationship to and a different experience of the photograph.

In the final works the viewer occupies the space of the camera and like the camera can look, however unlike the camera's original results the experience is not broken and stilted. The experience for the viewer is not comparable to the cinematic even though there are cinematic indicators. The viewer enters into a darkened room, the soft whirring and continuous light source of the projectors illuminates an image that is photographic in its production yet filmic in its presentation. The work is not about privileging the moving over the still image. The piece puts forward an experience of the photograph that is an alliance between the two media.

I based my research on changing how we can experience photography, in this case the portrait, with a somewhat consuming desire to encourage people to look for a bit longer than they may already. To do this the production of the work, from the outset, needed to challenge how we experience the photographic portrait. There was

the imperative need to move the work away from the transient nature of identity in the portrait and towards encouraging the viewer to look, consider and wonder. The initial and salient difference was that this lead me to adopt a style of shooting that produced a view autonomous from my own view, I came out from behind the camera. The viewer will never experience what I saw, or what the subject saw, they will have their own experience. I was looking and the subject was looking and the camera was looking on and recording. I didn't feel like I was photographing my subjects, rather we were exchanging the gaze of the camera for the gaze of one another.

It could be said that one of the key values of art is to stimulate the visual faculty and through the act of looking all the thoughts one can consider. The use of filmic technology in *The Empty Portrait* activates the eye of the viewer; it brings time to the piece, a time of looking. The works are re-presentations or portraits of how the subjects looked at me, the identity of the subject becomes inconsequential, this is not a concretized view. Ultimately all that remains is a record of the them looking at me.

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