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A Mirror With An Imagination

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts at Massey University Wellington, New Zealand.

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2016

Abstract

The photographic work *A Mirror With An Imagination* consists of photographs made in a way consistent with the vernacular photographic tradition. However, their appearance is quite different to what might be expected from that tradition. The lack of worldly context in the images means that they present to the viewer as possibilities, to be completed by the imagination. The reason for this approach is explained by reference to the partial disconnect between the photographer's intentions and the viewing experience of the audience, as described by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (1981). An investigation into Barthes' thought leads to an ontological position espoused by Jean-Paul Sartre in *L'Imaginaire* (2004), in which he describes the photograph as a partial object with an ontological connection to its referent that nevertheless must be completed by the imagination of the viewer. This action allows for the subjectivity of the viewer to act upon the content of the photograph, as their particular experiences and memories influence what they add to the content of the image.

In reflecting on this I identify the theme of the contingent nature of our experience – the sense of the arbitrariness of circumstance and that many things that are might not be, or might be different – as a definitive factor within this subjective action. I also identify that the ontological relationship between world and photograph means that photographs innately express this contingency.

I then discuss making photographic work informed by these understandings, in particular the necessity of light in the photographic process and its strong relation to our imaginative metaphorical usage and also the idea of contingency. I continue to outline the choices made in producing this work with reference to the art photographic tradition; in particular the constructed work of Jeff Wall, indexicality as seen in Ed Ruscha and the Bechers, Andreas Gursky's engagement with art history and Hiroshi Sugimoto's conceptual use of light and approach to the sublime.

Contents

Photographs – *A Mirror With An Imagination*

Introduction

Part One – *Studium* – The Gap Between Intention and Effect

- I. *Nec studium, nec punctum*
- II. That-has-been
- III. The subjectivity of the imagination

Part Two – *Punctum* – An Idiosyncratic Approach to Vernacular Photography

- IV. On the possibility of a synthesis of *studium* and *punctum*
- V. Light as metaphor
- VI. Above and beyond

Conclusion

Appendix of Images

References

Bibliography

Notes