

**Figuring the
photographic portrait studio
as a psychic apparatus.**

Jonathan Baggaley

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Abstract:

'Figuring the photographic portrait studio as a psychic apparatus.'

This research project makes use of photographic art practice as an investigative tool, through which a variety of strategies have been employed in order to picture the traditional photographic portrait studio. The thesis provides both a context within which to understand this art practice and expands upon and develops the themes proposed by it. The history of the photographic studio is presented in traditional narrative form and as a discursive formation; being analysed at two specific junctures within this narrative. This historical and cultural contextualisation allows the studio to be viewed in terms of a space and apparatus that embody particular characteristics. It is suggested that whilst these characteristics are explicitly located within discourses relating to class and aesthetics they also incorporate an implicit psychical dimension.

The studio as an apparatus is analysed as constituting particular subject positions. These are discussed in relation to ideas drawn from film theory that utilise Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts. The studio is considered as a space in which the presence of the Lacanian Gaze becomes suggested with particular prominence. As an architecture that embodies the presence of the gaze, the studio is discussed in relation to a number of theories around the nature of space and modernity. The possibility of transference as an element of the studio encounter is also posited.

Four artists (Helmut Newton, Jemima Stehli, Broomberg and Chanarin and Christopher Williams) are identified as producing work that critically engages the space of the studio. Analysis of this work serves to develop the arguments made so far and provides an extended consideration of the particular subject object relationships that become played out in the studio. This becomes developed further in relation to commercial portrait practices and is demonstrated through analysis of portraits by Mike Disfarmer and Suresh Punjabi both of whom have been the subject of significant theoretical discussion.

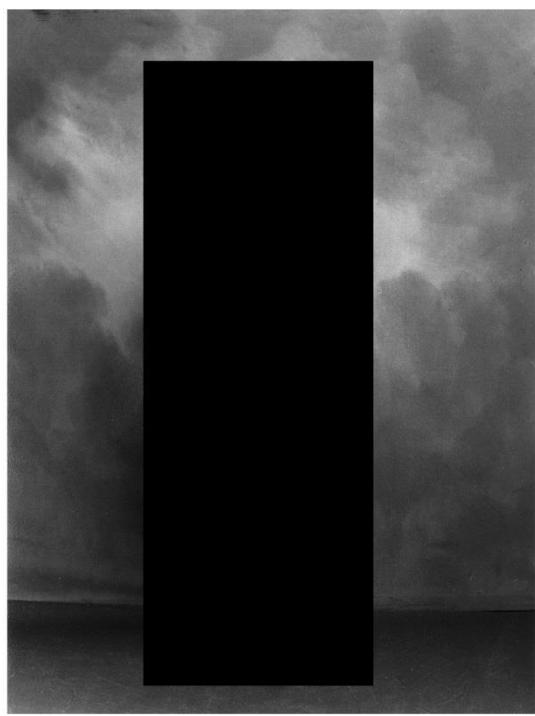
The thesis concludes with a reflection on how the practice produced for this research has both been conceived and executed in relation to theory but also on how it can be thought of as providing, in itself, a unique and valuable contribution to knowledge. It is argued that the practice not only makes visible a coercive discourse and psychic economy implicit within the studio but that it also promotes a particularly compelling and pertinent consideration of how the two might be related.

Keywords: studio, apparatus, Lacan, Gaze, portrait, backdrop, *l'objet petit a*, commercial photography, subject, transference.

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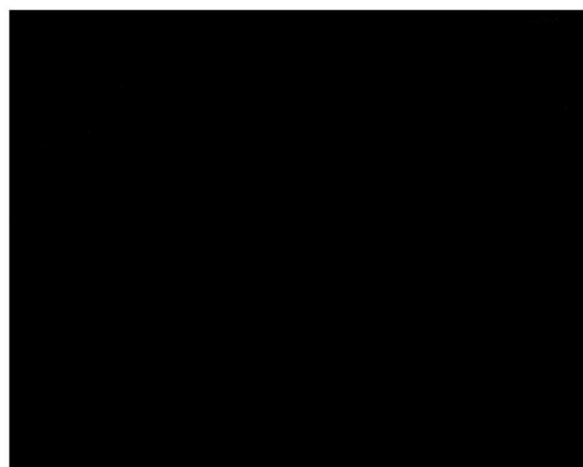
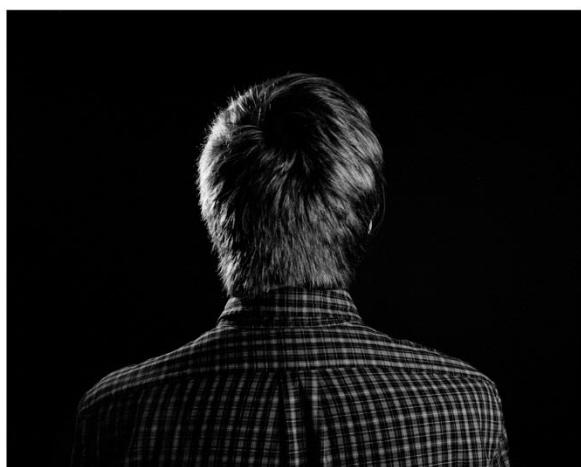
PART I
PHOTOGRAPHS

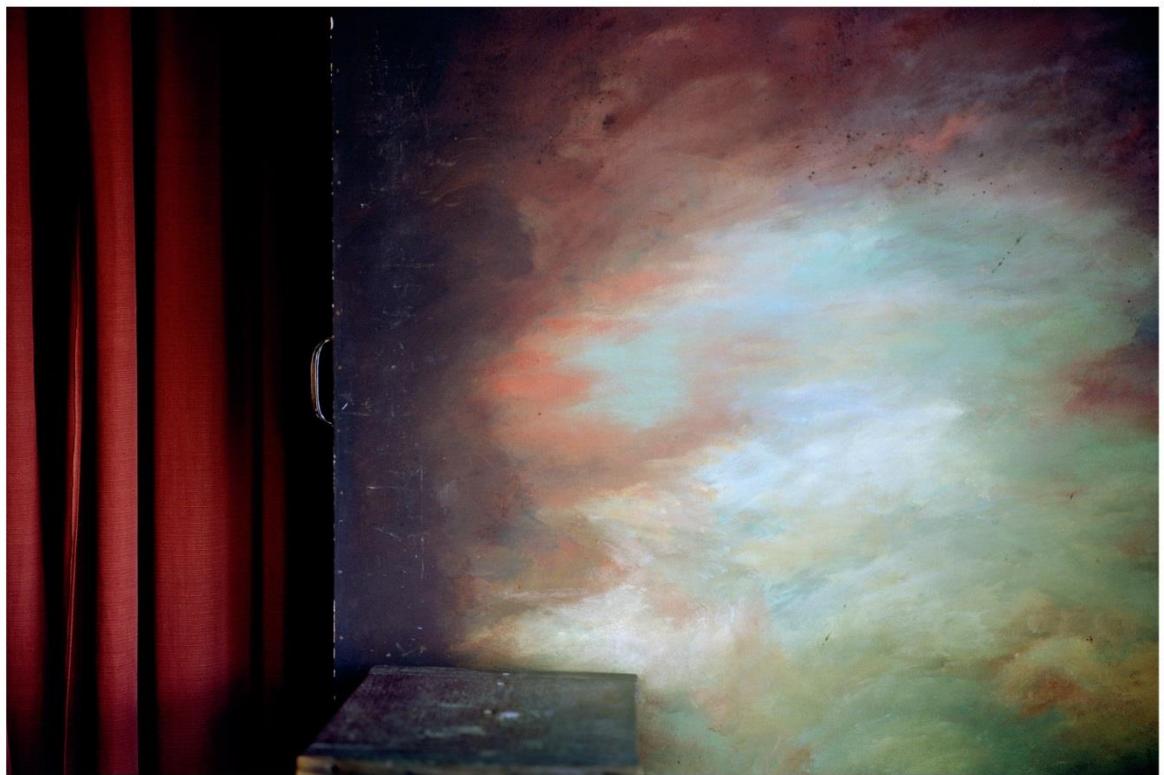




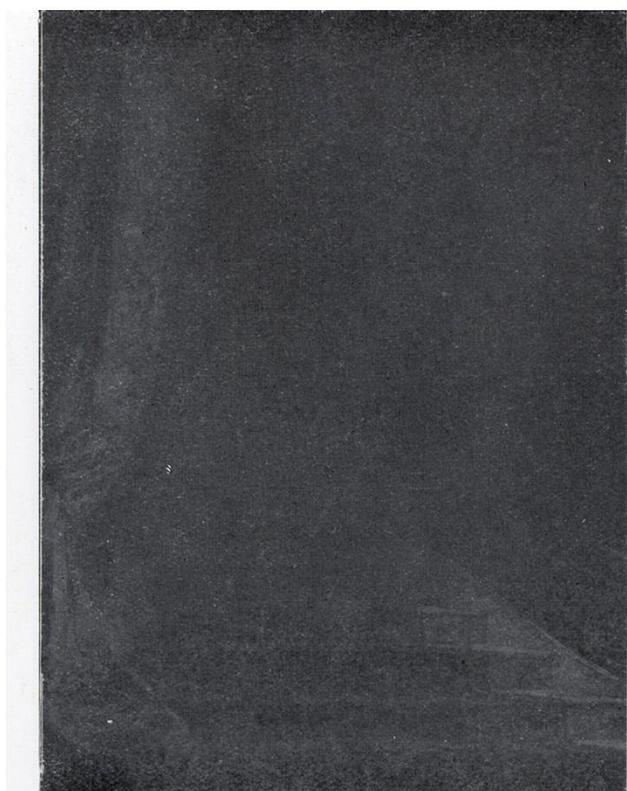












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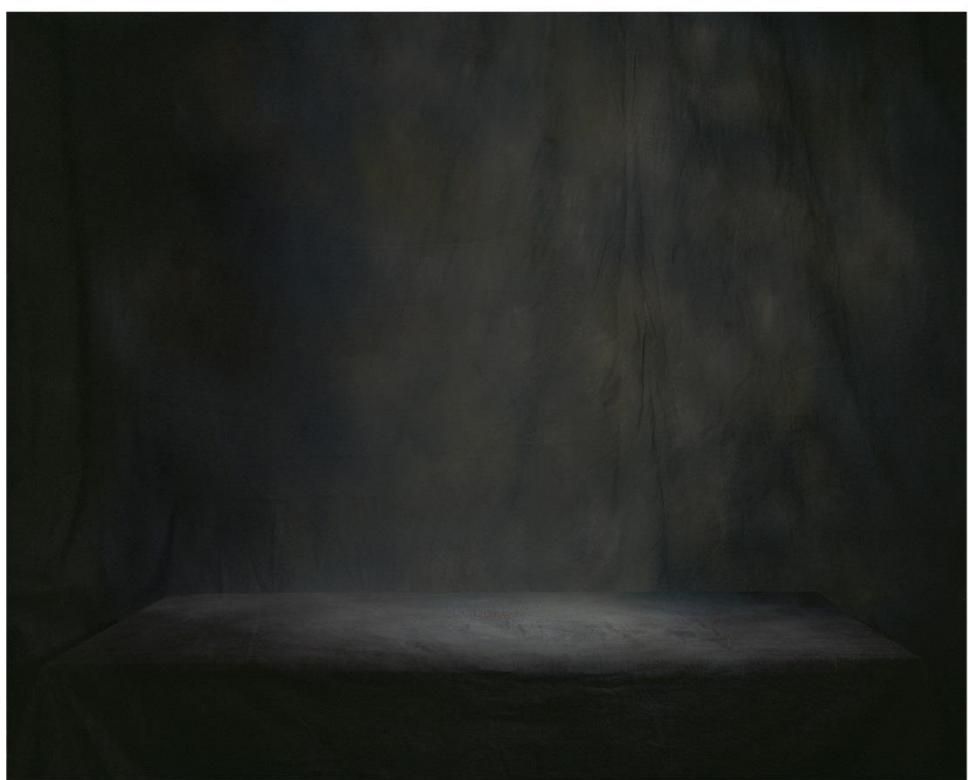
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PART II

THESIS

Contents

List of Illustrations	<i>3</i>
Declaration	<i>11</i>
Preface	<i>13</i>
Introduction and Methodology	<i>17</i>
<i>Chapter One</i> Historical and Cultural Contexts	<i>31</i>
<i>Chapter Two</i> A Psychic Space	<i>77</i>
<i>Chapter Three</i> The Studio Photographed	<i>117</i>
<i>Chapter Four</i> Reflections on Practice	<i>189</i>
Conclusion	<i>249</i>
Bibliography	<i>257</i>

Illustrations

Chapter One

Figure 1: Honore Daumier, *Reputedly The Most Commodius Position for a Good Daguerreotype Portrait* from Le Charivari (July 24, 1847) <http://www.luminous-lint.com/app/image/78458467346827895530241/> (Accessed 20th September 2012)

Figure 2: O.H. Willard *Séance de pose chez un photographe* 1855 (ca) Daguerreotype Musée d'Orsay <http://www.luminous-lint.com/app/image/9695558349682426532768517326/> (Accessed 20th September 2012)

Figure 3: Unidentified photographer *Display of Photographic Studio Equipment* 1865 (ca) Tintype, 1/4 plate, hand-coloured Cornell University Library <http://www.luminous-lint.com/app/image/048543973040447515165307857/> (Accessed 24th September 2012)

Figure 4: M.B Brady's New Photographic Gallery, Corner of Broadway and Tenth Street, New York. Engraving from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper Jan 5th 1861 p. 108 <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/95508946/> (Accessed 10th October 2012)

Figure 5: *Mr. E.J. Foss (Boston)* 1887 (Published in "Wilson's Quarter Century in Photography. A Collection of Hints on Practical Photography which form A Complete Text-Book of the Art" by Edward L. Wilson (New York: Edward L. Wilson, 1887), p.115, fig.127

http://www.luminouslint.com/app/vexhibit/_THEME_People_taking_photographs_illustrations_01/6/23/7235653348721726923617/ (Accessed 12th February 2014)

Figure 6: Unidentified photographer/creator *Fig. 86. - Coupe de l'atelier vitré* 1863 showing the construction of a rooftop glasshouse studio. [http://www.luminous-](http://www.luminous-lint.com/app/image/045548450348324155637669/)

Figure 7: Interior of Stafhell & Kleingrothe photographic studio in Medan, Holland

1898. From the collection of Tropenmuse, Amsterdam.

http://collectie.tropenmuseum.nl/default.aspx?idx=ALL&field=*&search=60001724
(Accessed 12th February 2014)

Figure 8: Behind the scenes at a busy carte de visite studio showing how the production process for cartes was divided into discreet tasks. Bibliotheque nationale de France, Paris.
BAJAC, Q. 2002. *The invention of photography: the first fifty years*, London, Thames & Hudson.

Figure 9: *Lady Victoria Doris Rachel Haig* by Lenare bromide print, circa 1930 National
Portrait gallery

<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portraitLarge/mw252694/Lady-Victoria-Doris-Rachel-Haig?LinkID=mp147941&role=sit&rNo=2> (Accessed 2nd October 2014)

Figure 10: Ruth Harriet Louise *Greta Garbo*, publicity still for *The Mysterious Lady* 1928
REISFELD, S. & DANCE, R. 2005. *Garbo - Portraits from her Private Collection*, New York,
Rizzoli

Figure 11: Ted Allen *Cary Grant* bromide print, 1936 National Portrait Gallery
<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw165251/Cary-Grant?LinkID=mp07835&role=art&rNo=1> (Accessed 2nd October 2012)

Figure 12: Frank Pease *Child Portrait* c.1950. BITNER, J. (Ed.) 2006 *La Porte, Indiana*,
New York, Princeton Architectural Press

Figures 13 & 14: Anonymous carte de visite portrait and B.C. Paice carte de visite).
EDWARDS, S. 2006. *The Making of English Photography: allegories*, Pennsylvania,
Pennsylvania State University Press

Figure 15: Family Studio Portrait from 1995. LEE, A. 1995. Pretty as a picture. *British Journal of Photography*, 142/7029, 10-11.

Figure 16: Winner of the 1998 Agfa European Portrait Awards. BERGER, W. 1998.
Shot from the heart. *British Journal of Photography*, 145/7180, 22-3.

Figures 17 - 20: Examples of the Venture Portrait style. LANSDOWN, T. 2001.
Portraiture a la mode. *British Journal of Photography*, 148/7311, 11-13.

Chapter Two

Figure 1: Diagram illustrating the concept of the gaze. LACAN, J. 1998. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, London, Vintage.

Figure 2: Hans Holbein the Younger *Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve (The Ambassadors)* 1533 <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/hans-holbein-the-younger-the-ambassadors> (Accessed 18th May 2013)

Chapter Three

Figure 1: Helmut Newton *Self Portrait with Wife June and Models* 1981
BURGIN, V. 1996. *In/Different Spaces: Place and Memory in Visual Culture*, California, University of California Press.

Figure 2: Jemima Stehli *Self Portrait with Karen* 2000 STEHLI, J. & BURROWS, D. 2003.
Jemima Stehli, [Birmingham], Article Press.

Figure 3: Jemima Stehli *Self Portrait with Grace* 2000 STEHLI, J. & BURROWS, D. 2003.
Jemima Stehli, [Birmingham], Article Press.

Figure 4: Jemima Stehli *Red Turning* 2000 STEHLI, J. & BURROWS, D. 2003. *Jemima Stehli*, [Birmingham], Article Press.

Figure 5: Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin *America's Next Top Model* from the series *American Landscapes* 2009 <http://www.choppedliver.info/american-landscapes/>
(Accessed 10th July 2014)

Figure 6: Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin *Beyoncé* from the series *American Landscapes* 2009 <http://www.choppedliver.info/american-landscapes/> (Accessed 10th July 2014)

Figure 7: Christopher Williams *Three Point Reflection Guide, © 1968 Eastman Kodak Company, 1968. (Meiko smiling), Vancouver, B.C. April 6, 2005.* 2005 http://www.lumiere-editions.com/lumiere-editons.com/Gallery/Pages/Christopher_Williams.html#0
(Accessed 14th August 2012)

Figure 8: Mike Disfarmer ca. 1940 DISFARMER, M. 2005 *Mike Disfarmer: Original Disfarmer Photographs*. New York and Gottingen, Germany: Steidl/Stephen Kasher Gallery.

Figure 9: Mike Disfarmer ca. 1940 DISFARMER, M. 2005 *Mike Disfarmer: Original Disfarmer Photographs*. New York and Gottingen, Germany: Steidl/Stephen Kasher Gallery.

Figure 10: Suresh Punjabi ca.1980 PINNEY, C. 2014a. *Artisan Camera Studio Photography from Central India*, South Chennai, India, Tara Books.

Chapter Four

Figure 1: Jonathan Baggaley, *Untitled* from the series *Cachet* 2011

Figure 2: Jonathan Baggaley, *Untitled* from the series *Cachet* 2011

Figure 3: Jonathan Baggaley, *Untitled* from the unused series *Likeness* 2012

Figure 4: Jonathan Baggaley, *Untitled* from the unused series *Likeness* 2012

Figure 5: Jonathan Baggaley, appropriated portrait with subject removed 2011

Figure 6: Jonathan Baggaley, *Untitled* two framed pigment prints 14"x11" 2012

Figures 7-9: Jonathan Baggaley, unused images from documented portrait session 2012

Figure 10: Jonathan Baggaley, *Untitled* framed pigment print 20"x16" 2012

Figure 11: Jonathan Baggaley, *Untitled* framed pigment print 24"x16" 2012

Figure 12: Jonathan Baggaley, *Untitled* two framed pigment prints 14"x11" 2012

Figures 13-14: Jonathan Baggaley, initial experiments with 5x4 camera 2013

Figures 15-16: Jonathan Baggaley, unused images depicting unlit figures of children 2012

Figure 17: Jonathan Baggaley, *Untitled* two framed pigment prints 14"x11" 2012

Figure 18: Jonathan Baggaley, view of the back of Reeves Studio in Lewes 2013

Figure 19: Jonathan Baggaley, *Untitled* framed pigment print 36"x24" 2013

Figure 20: Jonathan Baggaley, *Untitled* framed pigment print 20"x16" 2013

Figure 21: Jonathan Baggaley, *Untitled* framed pigment print 20"x16" 2012

Figure 22: Jonathan Baggaley, *Untitled* framed pigment print 42"x34" 2014

Figures 23-26: Jonathan Baggaley, unused still life images 2014

Figure 27: Jonathan Baggaley, unused still life image 2014

Figure 28: Jonathan Baggaley, *Untitled* framed pigment print 20"x16" 2014

Figure 29: Jonathan Baggaley, *Untitled* two framed pigment prints 16"x12" 2014

Figure 30: Jonathan Baggaley, *Untitled* framed pigment print 20"x16" 2014

Figure 31: Jonathan Baggaley, *Untitled* framed pigment print 20"x16" 2014

Figures 32-35: Jonathan Baggaley, installation shots from the final show at The Dorset Place Gallery in Brighton July 2015

Conclusion

Figure 1: Jonathan Baggaley, *Untitled* six framed pigment prints 16"x12" 2014

Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. M. J."

Dated: 23rd September 2015

Preface

When, in 2009, I found myself working in a high street photographic lab I experienced a profound sense of despair. I had worked in photographic labs on more than one occasion in the past. In fact it was this type of retail environment, both stressful and poorly paid, that I had hoped to escape through my recent studies. How could I have a Masters in Photography and a teaching qualification and yet still be working in such a place? To make matters worse the lab in question incorporated a small portrait studio which I was now responsible for, both as a manager and photographer. Not only was domestic studio portraiture something I knew little about it also seemed the antithesis of my own carefully nurtured practice.

In my previous experience as a printer I had been required to produce prints for many other studio portrait photographers. I had always considered this the least interesting type of work, usually characterised by repetitive, formulaic and unimaginative imagery and often, particularly in the case of school photographers, required in large quantities. I far preferred the more haphazard images produced by the amateur snapshot photographer. In fact it was the world of the family snapshot that had gone on to become an important characteristic of my own practice. I now had to find a way to come to terms with not only printing studio portraits again but also having to take them.

In many ways the work was exactly as I had predicted. The portrait sittings required that I adhere to a strict regime in keeping with the traditions of the long established and somewhat old fashioned studio. The prints that I produced were of the type I expected, being only marginally more interesting on account of my own agency as photographer.

However there was something else here; something that, despite all my reservations and confirmed expectations, pricked my interest. Perhaps it was my recent studies that allowed me to view my newfound position from a slightly detached and analytical perspective. Perhaps too this allowed me to be more attuned to what I can only describe as a profound sense of history; a sense that I was partaking in something that was at once an age old tradition and also a reminder of how young photography, as a medium, really was. Hanging on the wall of the studio reception room was a decorative china plate depicting Henry Fox Talbot; I regarded this as somehow symbolic of these feelings. I felt that I was part of a history of photography in a way that I had never considered before.

Needless to say, this sense of history was not shared by my colleagues, for them it seemed, this photographic environment was simply a place of work. I felt a little like the prisoner returning to Plato's cave; enlightened yet now also detached. It wasn't too long however before my rather romantic musings became dulled by the day to day pressures of my role and I too began to see the studio and lab as just work to be done. There was one aspect of this job however that continued to intrigue me, something that not only perpetuated my analytical detachment but that also seemed to increase in significance each time that I became aware of it.

The studio was located next to the photo lab in a corner premises. From the outside the two were presented as separate businesses each with its own entrance, but they were in fact joined and connected via an internal door that lead from the labs shop floor to the reception area of the studio. This is relevant because the photo lab offered, as one of its many services, the taking of identity photographs for passports, driving licences and the like. Customers who requested this service were led from the shop through to the studio

where the photograph would be taken. This would happen on average about ten times a day. What was interesting about this arrangement was that most of the customers who requested id photographs were not expecting to find themselves in a fully equipped photographic studio. For two years I led customers through to this studio and experienced their reaction on entering the space. It became apparent as time went on that there was a very particular reaction that the studio seemed to engender; not in everyone but in enough to mark it as a distinct phenomenon. Sometimes this would be vocalised as an expression of surprise but often it was less obvious, detectable only in subtle changes of mood or demeanour. Occasionally though it would become fully articulated by a customer as a sense of anxiety.

For a long time this observation remained little more than a diversion from the everyday routine, something that I noticed from time to time. Soon however it became an occurrence that I actively looked out for, something that seemed intriguing because it marked the studio space in which I worked as significant in a way that I had not previously considered. It was perhaps this realisation that allowed me to view the studio not just in terms of its commercial function and its inevitable association with the photographs that it produces but as a space that might be usefully explored through my own practice.

Having worked in the studio for over a year I produced a body of work called *Cachet* comprising images of the different backdrops that the studio used. I was intrigued by the disparity between the sublime spaces that these appeared to suggest and their rather routine functionality. This was underlined by various surface markings on parts of the backdrops, an index of the many portrait sitting they had served. I see this work now as a

kind of test for the research that has followed. It allowed me to see the potential of the photographic studio as both a subject that might be usefully explored through my practice but also how this might go on to provide ways to understand the particular reactions I had observed in the studio space.

Introduction and Methodology

How can photography be restored to its own history? And how can we ensure this history will be both materially grounded and conceptually expansive, just like the medium itself? Well, perhaps we should start by considering what has always been excluded from photography's history: ordinary photographs, the ones made or bought by everyday folk from 1839 until now, the photographs that preoccupy the home and the heart but rarely the museum or the academy.'

Geoffrey Batchen (Batchen, 2002: 57)

The domestic studio portrait epitomizes the type of 'ordinary photograph' that Geoffrey Batchen identifies here as being 'bought by everyday folk'; as preoccupying 'the home and the heart'. Such domestic studio portraits, Batchen goes on to point out, constitute the vast majority of photographs that are commercially produced (Batchen, 2002: 59); a fact that furthers his case for their increased representation within photographic history. The apparent contradiction here is perhaps unsurprising; the commercial portrait, in all but a few exceptional cases, has become characterised by a formulaic and conventionalised style that appears almost ubiquitous; rendering the individual studio portrait significant only within its immediate domestic context. Such ubiquity, however, is perhaps itself remarkable; suggesting underlying conditions that might belie yet help explain the outwardly mundane appearance of the portraits themselves. The presence of such underlying conditions is further invoked through a number of prominent theoretical debates on the nature of photographic meaning. Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard have each called upon the domestic commercial portrait in order to illustrate concepts that have become pivotal to photographic theory (Benjamin, 1972, Benjamin, 1931, Barthes, 1993, Baudrillard, 1999a). How is it, then, that such 'ordinary

photographs', so unremarkable and commonplace as to have 'always been excluded from photography's history' can also be those seemingly most suited to the generation of philosophical thought?

In a way these ambiguities and contradictions can be seen as symptomatic of the medium itself, implicit within photography's mutable and fugitive discourse and reflected in its widespread dissemination. Photography since its inception has been notoriously resistant to both definition and categorisation taking up residence within the domains of science and art with equal veracity but never wholly satisfying the exclusive demands of either. Furthermore the rapid incorporation of photography into all walks of life has led to a situation in which the photographic image can be regarded as a defining characteristic of modernity, having become both omnipresent and wholly naturalised. As a consequence the way that we perceive ourselves and those around us cannot help but be shaped in part by the photographic image. Photography has become 'increasingly fundamental to the constitution of subjectivity in modern society' (Lowry, 2006: 69). Of specific significance to this altered constitution of subjectivity will be those photographs that we have of ourselves, images that can be regarded as supplementing the mirror image in ways that strongly assert the presence of an other within the perception and visualisation of the self. That the nature of subjectivity has become transformed by so quixotic and complex a medium renders the relationship we have with the apparatus of photography of particular interest. This relationship whilst ongoing, and present throughout the flux of everyday existence, is perhaps especially apparent at those moments when we are being photographed; and whilst this might potentially occur within any situation there is only one space that has been exclusively designated for this purpose; the photographic studio. The studio as part of the apparatus of photography is a space in which the

relationship between the self and image, between subject and object, becomes played out; and whilst no longer the necessity it once was (in procuring a photographic portrait) the studio's enduring presence as an arena within which we become made as image serves as the object of this research.

This research proposes a consideration of the photographic studio through a combination of photographic practice and written analysis; maintaining a dialogical relationship between the two. This is a conceptual enquiry which seeks to engage its object through the deployment of a critical photographic art practice; it seeks to encourage the generation of philosophical arguments that can be seen as providing a useful and meaningful contribution to debates on the theory of photography and its practices. The practice element of this research is designed to be encountered as an exhibited body of work. The majority of images from this exhibition are reproduced at the beginning of the thesis (albeit in reduced scale) allowing an appreciation of the practice and its relation to this text even in the absence of the original pieces. Having discussed a methodological approach in this introduction our first chapter aims to provide both an historical context for the research and ways of thinking the photographic studio as a discursive space. The practice can be seen to offer a variety of responses to this space, some of which suggest a psychic dimension and these become considered and articulated in the second chapter. The third chapter explores how artists have responded to the studio in the past and how their work might engage with the ideas we have proposed, as well as potentially suggesting others for consideration. The fourth chapter presents a reflection on the body of photographic work speculating on how such practice might be viewed as mobilising, as well as responding to, theory; whilst also functioning as a valuable means of research in its own rite. Before we begin however a

brief consideration of practical, historical and theoretical approaches will provide a little contextual background.

Approach to practice

The underlying methodological strategy for this research project figures practice as a space of argument and reflection. The aim is to develop a visual language able to reflect upon or consider reflexively the space of the photographic studio itself. This is achieved through a series studio based photographic experiments that engage with various theoretical ideas. Some propose commercial portraiture as a coercive discourse with the subject constrained within and for the apparatus; others allude to its psychic economy where screens or backdrops and the tear propose Lacanian ideas; with the subject, often pictured as absent, being constituted on a notion of lack.

The methodology is therefore located within the practice; the variety of strategies employed is designed to develop a complex of pictures each of which produces a point of reflection on the constitution of the photographic portrait studio and how this in turn operates to further an understanding of the constitution of the subjects that become positioned within it. These visual articulations form a dialogical relationship with the written thesis in that they are both precipitated through an engagement with theoretical ideas and serve to propose further interrogation of these ideas within a particular context. The practice does not seek to illustrate theoretical ideas in as much as this would render it merely illustrative. The aim is, rather, to open up areas of debate by problematizing the

site of commercial photographic studio portraiture through the strategic deployment of a reflexive photographic art practice.

This methodological approach assumes an acceptance of the idea that new knowledge can be located within practice in a way that is distinct from, yet equally valid to, that located in written theory. Timothy Emlyn Jones distinguishes ‘knowledge in action’ from the more traditional notion of ‘knowledge on reflection’. ‘Knowledge in action supposes that practical activity is itself intrinsically intelligent. It supposes thinking through art. It also stands against the absurdity of the theory/practice dichotomy which seems to imply that you must switch your brain off in order to make art....and then switch it back on again in order to reflect on what you have made’. (Jones, 2006: 227) Estelle Barrett describes how knowledge that comes through practice in this way can bring into view ‘particularities of lived experience’ that would prove difficult to achieve through alternative research methods and she sites Barbara Bolt’s notion of ‘materialising practices’ which proposes that new knowledge emerges from human involvement with objects in the world (Barrett, 2007: 143). Bolt borrows the term ‘originary’ from Levinas to describe a way of understanding, produced through art practice, that derives from or originates in, and of, the thing in question. She draws on Heidegger’s Being and Time to further demonstrate the importance of this type of understanding. ‘Heidegger argues that we do not come to know the world theoretically through contemplative knowledge in the first instance. Rather we come to know the world theoretically only after we have come to understand it through handling. Thus the new can be seen to emerge in the involvement with materials, methods, tools and ideas of practice.’ (Bolt, 2007: 30) It is from this perspective that we can start to view photographic practice as being ideally suited to the task of investigating its own condition as mediated through cultural

practices. Photographic practice is both infinitely mutable yet at the same time complicit in perpetuating prevailing ideology through fixed and conventionalised commercial practices; it is particularly suited to this task in its apparent transparency (it is not usually the photograph that is perceived other than as a window to its referent). It is in the exploitation of photography's mutability that photographic practice can be deployed as an effective means of research being uniquely equipped to reflect on and reveal its own complices both in relation to cultural identity and desire.

Approach to History

The commercial photographic studio plays a large part in the early history of the medium a fact that reflects both the clamour for photographic portraits and the initial technological restrictions encountered in obtaining them. Once these restrictions had been overcome the studio became less necessary and less visible. Conventional histories of the medium tend therefore to provide accounts of early studios in relation to portraiture as the sites of technological and artistic innovation, but commercial studios after about 1900 are seldom mentioned; not because they cease to exist after this time but because they fail to meet the criteria necessitated by traditional historical accounts. For our purposes we need to find a more useful way of providing an historical context for our research. Victor Burgin's describes this type of narrativising approach in his introduction to Thinking Photography; a collection of essays that sought to redress the restrictive singular historical account of the medium with a plural histories. Of the former Burgin observes: 'What has most often been described is a particular nuancing of 'art history', brought about by the invention of the camera, a story cast within the familiar

confines of ‘masters’, ‘masterworks’ and ‘movements’ – a *partial* account which leaves the social fact of photography largely untouched.’ (Burgin, 1982: 142) Burgin’s collection brought together new photographic writing by the likes of Alan Sekula and John Tagg that sought to revise photographic discourse; placing it within much broader cultural and social debates applying ideas gleaned from the writings of Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser . It is in these more discursive, intertextual histories that we find a useful way of approaching an historical account of a particular formation such as the studio.

On his archaeological method Foucault writes: ‘Archaeology is not in search of inventions.....but neither is it concerned with the average phenomena of opinion....What it seeks is not to draw up a list of founding saints; it is to uncover the regularity of discursive practice.’ (Foucault, 2002: 144) By adopting a Foucauldian approach photography can be viewed in a way that doesn’t tie it to a historical narrative but rather sets out ‘to investigate what might be most hidden in the relations of power, to anchor them in the economic infrastructures; to trace them not only in their governmental forms but also in the infra-governmental or para-governmental ones; to discover them in their material play’ (Tagg, 1988: 70)

John Tagg’s *The Burden of Representation* can be seen as an attempt to locate meaning and effects (particularly in respect to truth) of photographs within and across institutions and the discourses within which they are set to work. Portrait photography in the 19th Century is analysed as a commodity linked to a particular stage of social evolution: ‘the rise of the middle and lower-middle classes towards greater social, economic and political importance’ resulting in a ‘democracy of the image’. Tagg goes on to analyse the use of photography within the similarly rapid evolution of institutions such as hospitals, prisons

and the police where it becomes used as a tool of surveillance and control leading to a ‘burden of representation’.(Tagg, 1988) Here Tagg also looks to the work of Louis Althusser in order to demonstrate how an explanation of power can be viewed not simply in terms of repressive power wielded by the ‘state apparatus’ but also as it is incorporated in apparently peripheral and independent institutions such as schools, the family and the media. If these ‘ideological state apparatus’, as Althusser distinguishes them, ‘function ‘by ideology’ by interpellating individual subjects in the positions created for them by the socio-technical division of labour then an ideology always exists in an apparatus and its practice of practices. This existence is always material.’(Tagg, 1988: 69) The significance of Tagg’s approach, for our purposes then, is that the studio and its practices and the subject positions it interpellates can be examined as an apparatus that embodies the material existence of an ideology in a particular way.

My methodology for realising this approach involves a brief narrative account of the studio followed by a more archaeological survey at two specific points within this narrative. The uneven nature of the written history of the studio has necessitated a combination of secondary and primary research. The narrative history and the archaeological survey from the 19th century are largely gleaned from secondary sources with the occasional addition of primary references from press articles recounting first hand experiences of visits to various studio premises. As we move through the twentieth century the narrative history draws more from primary sources such as manuals for photographic enthusiasts and news articles in the photographic and national press. The archaeological survey of the late 20th century is drawn exclusively from primary research using articles that appeared in the British Journal of Photography at the time.

Approach to Theory

In his posthumously published book *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes attempts to discover and articulate ‘what photography is ‘in itself’...’ (Barthes, 1993: 3). This ‘ontological desire’, Barthes tells us, stems from an encounter with a portrait, taken in 1852, of Napoleon’s youngest brother. Barthes describes his amazement on the realisation that ‘I am looking at eyes that have looked at the emperor’ (Barthes, 1993: 3) an amazement he found both profound yet difficult to convey. Distancing himself from the semiotic analysis of photography which characterises his earlier work Barthes attempts to adopt the position of ‘a primitive, without culture’ (Barthes, 1993: 7). His subsequent text is a phenomenological and deeply personal exploration of his relationship to photography, drawing from ideas that originate in the writings of Jean Paul Sartre and Jaques Lacan.¹ Barthes proposes that a photograph will always show ‘not the optionally real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the necessarily real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph’ (Barthes, 1993) For Barthes this is an essential quality; a photograph cannot fail but show something ‘*that-has-been*’. Barthes goes on to condense all cultural coding of the photograph into what he calls its *studium* and then identifies, in contrast to this, what he terms the *punctum* that occurs in certain photographs; an element or detail that is beyond signification and that reaches out to prick the viewer. In order to illustrate this Barthes turns to a portrait of an

¹ The dedication page to Camera Lucida reads ‘In Homage to *L'Imaginaire* by Jean-Paul Sartre. Barthes sites Lacan in his opening thoughts on photography equating the *This* that seems proposed by the photograph with the Lacanian Real. Michael Payne summarises these influences; ‘The opening pages of Camera Lucida allude extensively to Sartre’s and Lacan’s rival theories of the imaginary, and one of the many ambitions of Barthes’s poignant and beautifully written book is to negotiate between them’ (Payne, 1997: 83). Sartre’s *L'Imaginaire* was published in 1941 nearly forty years before Camera Lucida. Sartre reflects at length on the way that photographic images and particularly portraits are unlike signs in that they deliver their object. Thus a photograph of Peter ‘delivers Peter, though Peter is not here’ (Sartre 1972) (Payne, 1997: 82)

anonymous family from 1926 photographed by James Van de Zee in which it is, at first, a detail of a pair of shoes (strapped pumps) and then, on returning to the image, a necklace that affect him in this way (Barthes, 1993: 53). Barthes asserts that the *punctum* is usually not intentional on the part of the photographer but occurs arbitrarily ‘it occurs in the field of the photographed thing like a supplement that is at once inevitable and delightful’ (Barthes, 1993: 47). Barthes goes on to argue that there is a form of *punctum* implicit in all photographs (and particularly those that picture people) because the *noeme* (“*that has been*”) of the photograph will also inevitably suggest “*this will be*” or death. ‘By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. What pricks me is the discovery of this equivalence.’ (Barthes, 1993: 96). This affect is not confined to the reception of photographs but is something that Barthes experiences when he himself is photographed.

‘I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity, sometimes of imposture (comparable to certain nightmares). In terms of image-repertoire, the Photograph (the one I intend) represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (or parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter’ (Barthes, 1993: 14)

The potential of the photograph to produce profound subject affects (*punctum*) through the irrefutable realisation of ‘*that has been*’ thus becomes implicated in the very act of being photographed which becomes experienced as the transformation of subject into object. From the outset Barthes describes the photograph as ‘the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency, matte and somehow stupid, the This, (this photograph, and not Photography), in short what Lacan calls the *Tuché*, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real

in its indefatigable expression'.(Barthes, 1993: 4) The very apparatus of photography is thus figured as an apparatus capable of producing such associations; as having the potential to suggest what is by definition beyond signification. The studio is uniquely positioned as a constituent of this apparatus and therefore as a unique space within which the subject cannot help but reconcile the transformative affects that Barthes describes.²

There is one further matter to be addressed before we proceed; it will no doubt be apparent that the notion of the subject that becomes proposed through a consideration of the studio as a discursive formation will be quite different from the subject position proposed by Barthes in *Camera Lucida*. Both I have argued as useful to our investigation so a brief articulation of the move from a Foucauldian to a Barthesian subject at the outset seems apt and will hopefully avoid any confusion as we proceed. For Foucault the notion of subjectivity is inextricably bound with ideas around knowledge and power or discourse. The subject can therefore only know he is a subject within the context of the discourse in which and through which he operates. Subjectivity is thus always located externally as a social construction and is always culturally and historically specific. What is apparent throughout *Camera Lucida* is that Barthes adopts a more psychoanalytic model of subjectivity one that privileges internal psychical forces over external cultural

² The suggestion that the photographic apparatus might be can somehow reveal something profound yet unauthored was perhaps first articulated by Walter Benjamin in *A Short History of Photography* from 1931 in which he identifies an 'optical unconscious' which he equated with the 'drives of the unconscious through psychoanalysis' (Benjamin, 1931: 203)
More recently Jean Baudrillard has argued that only in photographs free from artistic intention can we glimpse the real that photography, in its unauthored essence, might reveal. Baudrillard uses photographs by Mike Disfarmer in order to demonstrate this. Disfarmer was a studio portrait photographer who operated in relative obscurity in a small Midwest US town during the middle three decades of the 20th century. To Baudrillard, Disfarmer's portraits of his fellow townsfolk reveal 'not something moral or related to "objective" conditions but that which remains indecipherable within each of us' (Baudrillard, 1999: 4)

conditions. Barthes subject is therefore more in line with a Lacanian view of a split subject one that is propelled and motivated by desire and founded on an essential lack.

It is also pertinent at this point to acknowledge the wider context from which the theorists I have chosen emerged and to argue my case for their relevance or usefulness to my object of enquiry. Lacan's theories can be viewed in terms of a Structuralist agenda that belongs to the 1950's and 1960's and specifically as an application of Saussure's semiology to psychoanalysis. Michel Foucault is commonly associated with the undermining of Structuralist thought with the publication of *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* along with Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* and *Writing and Difference* in the late 1960's. These works questioned the notion of closed systems capable of demonstrating underlying meaning, emphasising instead the differences and excess elements necessarily inherent in any system (Emerling, 2012: 214). Foucault too was notoriously sceptical of psychoanalytic theory resisting any suggestion that subjectivity might be explained in terms of internal and unconscious forces that appear indifferent to history. How then can these seemingly incompatible and arguably outdated bedfellows prove useful to our enquiry? The answer lies in the nature of the studio itself and within the methodology of this research. Through the adoption of photographic practice as a means of research we are in effect required to allow this practice to propose the direction of our enquiry. The studio is evidently a cultural and social construct and certain elements of my own practice clearly propose this dimension. The studio too is pictured in ways that strongly suggest its affects in terms of interior and unconscious forces for the subjects positioned within it. To explore both these propositions from a singular theoretical standpoint would be limiting. I have chosen rather to argue each from what I believe to be the most appropriate perspective; that is the perspective that seems to

further our understanding of what the practice appears to propose. It seems somewhat unhelpful to conclude that if one can usefully articulate a particular object in terms of a discursive formation that it then becomes somehow invalid to consider it in another way. I would argue rather that it is healthy to approach an object of enquiry from a number of perspectives if they each seem relevant. In a way this is the beauty of a practice based PhD; it seems less bound by theory and as a result theory is pushed in directions that might otherwise be hard to realise. Gillian Rose notes how the use of Foucauldian discourse analysis in much contemporary visual research commonly constitutes just one aspect of a more eclectic approach. She goes on to argue that ... 'a mix of discourse analysis and semiology, with perhaps a dash of Lacan and Deleuze, seems to constitute the default method of a great deal of cultural and visual studies.' (Rose, 2012: 191).

Nonetheless having adopted such disparate positions in our argument it would be negligent to ignore the inevitable questions that this raises and, without wishing to get overly entrenched in the history of western thought, I turn to Joan Copjec who attempts to reconcile Foucauldian and Lacanian thought in *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Histirocists*. Copjec argues that the historicist position is in itself inadequate to explain the complexities of culture because it negates the aspect of desire. Through this manoeuvre Copjec makes a compelling case for a reading of history that doesn't sit solely at the cultural level urging '...analysts of culture to become literate in desire, to learn how to read what is inarticulable in cultural statements' (Copjec, 1994: 14) . Psychoanalysis in itself might be argued, as it has been, to negate history yet to dismiss psychoanalytic ideas entirely from the historical project seems equally negligent. Through 'proudly professing to be illiterate in desire' historicism grounds being in appearance, whereas 'psychoanalysis, via Lacan, maintains that the exclusivity of the surface of appearance must be interpreted to mean that appearance always routs or supplants being, that

appearance and being never coincide'. Thus the historicism that Foucault has cultivated is 'guilty of effacing the pockets of empty, inarticulable desire that bear the proof of society's externality to itself.' (Copjec, 1994: 14)

The purpose of this research is not to attempt to reconcile these two positions but the relationship between them is a constant presence; one that creates a tension that can be argued to characterise our investigation of the studio and even provide its momentum.

The importance and unavoidable presence of this relationship is perhaps most successfully proposed within the practical research which maintains the potential to short circuit theoretical contradiction with a disarming economy of means. As we have noted the conceptual complexities invoked by photography render it a medium that evades easy definition, one frequently characterised by contradictory effects. In our exploration of the spaces where such a medium most comprehensively engages with the human subject what better medium to employ as an investigative tool than photography....what more apt way to consider the ambiguities inherent within the apparatus than by turning that apparatus on itself?

Chapter One

Historical and Cultural Contexts

Introduction

This chapter will aim to provide a way of understanding the photographic studio as a distinct space; a space that not only comprises a particular set of physical characteristics but one that has become constituted through an identifiable and distinct set of historical and cultural discourses. The history of the studio and its practices is not the focus of this thesis but it is nonetheless vital to demarcate the territory of our research through the provision of an effective context. Through a combination of approaches this chapter seeks to build up a platform from which to launch our subsequent visual and theoretical investigations.

Methodology

We have already touched upon the debates concerning the propensity for written history, and perhaps particularly that of photography, to construct narratives; generalising what is essentially a disparate group of practices. We have also mentioned the archaeological approach to history proposed by Foucault that has become adopted by many recent photographic historians and theorists as a more effective way to understand more prosaic and widespread practices. The generalizing tendency of the former method, a kind of looking down from above, is contrasted by an approach that deals exclusively with, and

within, that which takes place at ground level at the level of the statement. It is clear that for our purposes, of providing context within a rather limited space, neither one of these methods would prove particularly effective in isolation, whilst conversely both can be argued to be useful. The dilemma here is one that is commonly encountered by historians who attempt to deal with photography and its practices; namely: how to reconcile the general (the grand narratives that encompass and derive from great thinkers, artistic genius and advances in technology) with the particular (the myriad of individual practices, and the millions of individual photographs produced). Siegfried Kracauer has suggested an approach to history that accommodates both of these seemingly irreconcilable conditions; one that allows each to exist without negating the other.³ Kracauer proposes that the historian pauses in, what he calls, the Anteroom of History; a place in which to ‘bring out and characterize the peculiar nature of an intermediary area’. (Kracauer, 1995: 192) and it is from this standpoint that I suggest we proceed with our contextualisation here.

In Kracauer’s conception the general view can never encompass the particulars, which fall within its orbit, as these will always prove evasive at the level of concrete cases. Kracauer suggests, rather, that the relationship between the general and the particular ‘carries an implication of great interest’ that they can be seen to co-exist without the need for one to be reduced to the other. ‘The general truth and a pertinent concrete conception may exist side by side, without their relation being reducible to the fact that logically the abstraction implies the concretion’ (Kracauer, 1995: 206). In order to

³ Kracauer draws comparisons between historical reality and photographic reality suggesting that both ‘are of a kind that does not lend itself to being dealt with in a definite way’ (Kracauer, 1995: 191). Both seem to encompass an internal dichotomy where the proliferation of particular details refuses to successfully illustrate the narratives or grand themes within which they appear to operate. For Kracauer the existence of photographs makes it ‘much easier for us to incorporate the transient phenomena of the outer world, thereby redeeming them from oblivion’. (Kracauer, 1995: 192)

illustrate this Kracauer looks to the historian Jacob Burkhardt's fluid and 'deliberately unsystematic' methods; often eschewing conventional chronology. Kracauer notes how Burkhardt favours 'single observations of interest, cross sections, etc as revealing "that which repeats itself, the constant and typical," which is something that "strikes a chord in us and which we understand".' (Kracauer, 1995: 210). Burkhardt's choice of points of focus therefore are not an attempt to illustrate or confirm a general historical theme nor are they systematically positioned in relation to each other; rather they are designed to provide a resonance capable of suggesting a level of understanding not easily accessed through these more conventional methods. It is this acknowledgement of a useful middle ground, 'a utopia of the in-between', and an acceptance that this can be both ambiguous and productive that proves a useful model here.

With this in mind we will proceed in the following manner. Firstly we will unfold a general and rather traditional history of the studio briefly charting its formative and well documented development through the nineteenth century to its less prominent and less visible manifestations in the twentieth century. This account will focus where possible on the form of the studio, its physical characteristics and the particulars of its methods of production through the frequent inclusion of contemporaneous, first-hand, accounts and descriptions from a variety of sources. Secondly, adopting a more Foucauldian approach, we will examine two instances where the everyday concerns of domestic portrait photographers have become reflected, and therefore brought into visibility, in the photographic press. This methodology will allow us to acknowledge the importance of each approach and provide an awareness of the ambiguous space that necessarily exists between them. The aim here is to provide the reader with an understanding of the object of our investigation whilst acknowledging the traps that such an endeavour elicits.....we

are not aiming at a comprehensive account here, nor a sociological survey...more a nuanced, fluid and informed demarcation of a particular discursive space.

Portrait Studios in the 19th Century

It took less than a year after Louis Daguerre's invention was made freely available 'to all humanity' by the French State in 1839 that commercial photographic portrait studios began to be established for the first time in New York, Paris and London. The length of exposure time required at this time whilst dramatically improved from its earliest realisations still represented a considerable problem in terms of achieving a successful portrait.⁴ The architecture of the studio space, the apparatus employed and the resulting experience of the portrait sitter all reflect these technical constraints in early Daguerreotype studios. The necessity for harnessing as much light as possible meant that photographers needed to locate their studios on the top floor of buildings often erecting a glass room on the roof. Richard Beard's studio in London had a circular glass roof that was tinted blue in order to reduce glare for the sitter without needing to increase exposure time. The discomfort involved in having a portrait made in one of these early Daguerreotype studios was soon the subject of ridicule in cartoons appearing in the popular press. The demands of the photographer and the seating apparatus designed to hold the sitter still during the exposure were likened to exercises in torture rather than portraiture.

⁴ The *Morning Chronicle* from 12th September 1840 reported: 'All the difficulties which were in the way of the application of this principle to the taking of portraits have been overcome by a gentleman by the name of Woolcott, a native, we believe, of New York, who has substituted for the camera of Daguerre, a metallic speculum, and has also introduced the use of large reflecting mirrors for the purpose of illuminating the features in such a way as to give a proper degree of light and shade to the countenance. By this new process the time required for a person to sit for his portrait is reduced so under different circumstances of the light, likenesses may be taken in from one to four minutes.'



Figure 1: Honore Daumier, *Reputedly The Most Commodius Position for a Good Daguerreotype Portrait* from *Le Charivari* (July 24, 1847)

This criticism was not just confined to cartoons, in his treatise on the Daguerreotype from 1845 Valicourt writes ‘The constraint imposed on the face under the still too lengthy influence of sunlight makes these portraits resemble real victims of torture’ (Bajac, 2002: 35)

Apart from the discomfort involved during the sitting there were other factors that caused a visit to the studio to be unsettling. Quentin Bajac notes that early studios were ‘accessible only after a trek up the stairs’ and that visitors then ‘had their throat overcome upon arrival by the acrid smell of chemical substances’. (Bajac, 2002: 34) The blue tinted light from the glass roof also added to the sense of unease. A visitor to Beards studio observed that ‘the livid paleness of complexion visible in the faces of the persons assembled caused a strange sensation’ (Heyert, 1979: 7). It seems that having a portrait taken in the early 1840s must have been quite an intimidating affair. The newness of the photographic process meant that not only was a visit to the photographer’s studio

uncharted and strange territory but also the concept of having a likeness made for the first time by this new process must have presented its own mix of unprecedented anxieties.

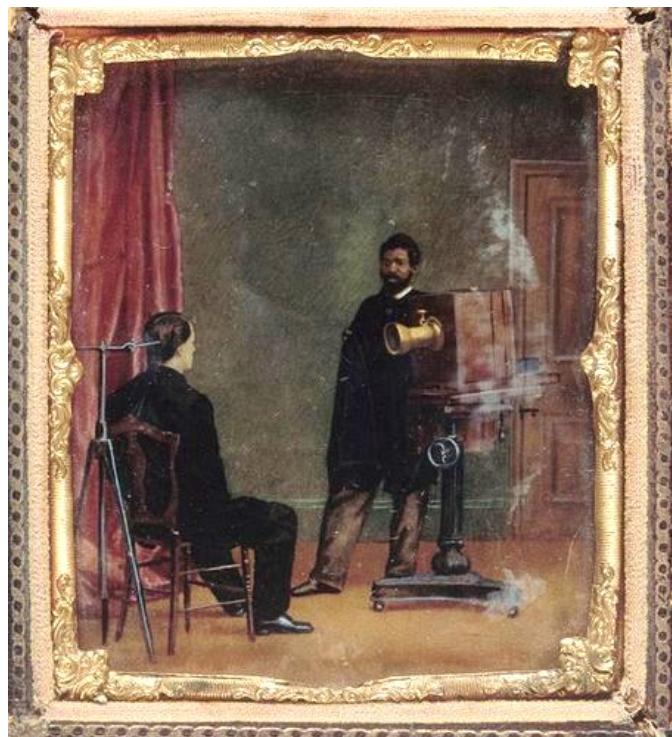


Figure 2: O.H. Willard
Séance de pose chez un photographe
1855 (ca) [Daguerreotype](#)
[Musée d'Orsay](#)



Figure 3: Unidentified photographer
Display of Photographic Studio Equipment
1865 (ca) [Tintype, 1/4 plate, hand-coloured](#)
[Cornell University Library](#)

Despite these public reservations, the Daguerreotype portrait rapidly became a commercial success. This new form of portraiture both precipitated and catered for an ‘unprecedented demand for images’(Lalvani, 1996:45) among the newly emerging middle classes. Fuelled by this demand, refinements in the process and competition between an ever increasing number of studios drove costs down and by 1853 ‘daguerreotypes became so cheap that almost all classes could afford to sit for them’(Tagg, 1988: 43). Rudisill notes that ‘by 1849 there were already two thousand Daguerreotypists in America, and Americans were spending between eight and twelve million dollars annually on portraits, which made up ninety five percent of photographic production’(Lalvani, 1996: 46, Tagg, 1988: 43). Lalvani describes New York studios, or ‘galleries’ as they

became known, as being ‘sumptuously furnished, making a visit to such a gallery a social event’ (Lalvani, 1996: 46) and by 1853 there were 86 such galleries in New York alone. Journalist and critic Ernest Lacan writing in 1855 observed: ‘The American daguerreotypists neglect nothing to attract and maintain public favour. They spend enormous sums on their studios, which are enchanted castles’. He goes on to describe the ‘marbles carved into columns, the richly embroidered hangings, valuable paintings, soft carpets deadening the sound of footsteps, aviaries of birds from all over the world and rare plants’ that these studios contained (Bajac, 2002: 52). These ‘upper class’ American studios were not necessarily representative of all studios at the time but their proliferation was an indication of the great demand for photographic portraits that had built over the medium’s first decade. To visit a photographic studio was now seen as a social event rather than a strange and potentially dangerous ordeal, and these extravagant American galleries played to this conception by maintaining an image of decadence and exclusivity catering to the social aspirations of the middle classes. Alan Trachtenberg describes Mathew Brady’s studio as consisting of three distinct functioning spaces: the reception room, the studio itself and the factory space of production (Trachtenberg, 1984: 245). The reception room was the most visible and accessible of these three spaces. This is where clients would wait for their sitting, come to make an appointment or simply browse through albums containing examples of the studio’s work. Marcus Aurelius Root in an account from 1864 observed that the reception room contained many framed portraits of ‘the leading types of characters which might be expected among the sitters, and to be calculated to call into vivid action the feelings pertaining to these characters’ (Lalvani, 1996: 66). The studio space, ‘where subjects were transformed into images’ is described by Lalvani as ‘a fabricated space, a theatrical space outfitted with props designed to promote the public self of portraiture’ and ‘through the use of Grecian

columns and voluminous drapes exude a civilizing and civilized air'.(Lalvani, 1996: 68).

The factory space was concealed from the public and sitters, this was the space of production where the various processes involved in the making of the daguerreotype; the coating, polishing, mercuralizing and finishing were carried out by a division of labour demanded by larger studios of the time.

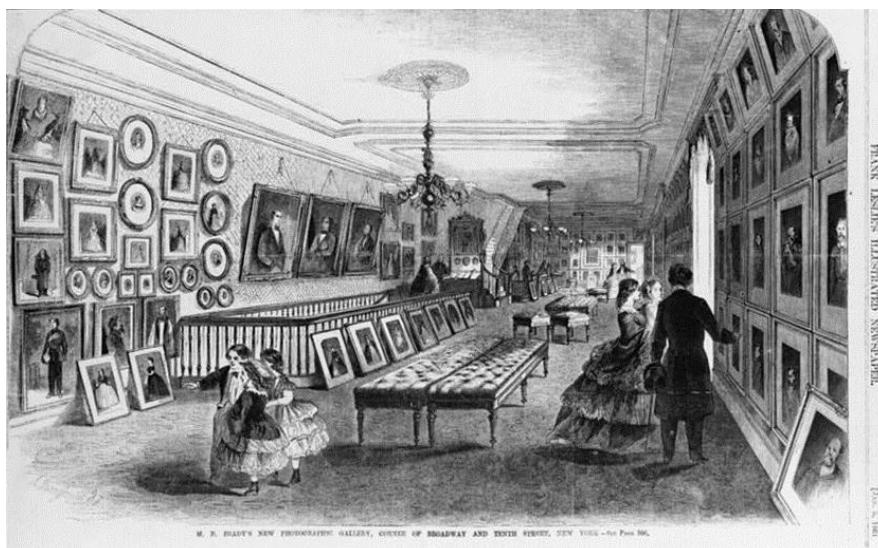


Figure 4: M.B Brady's New Photographic Gallery, Corner of Broadway and Tenth Street, New York. Engraving from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper Jan 5th 1861 p. 108

With the advent of the collodion wet plate process in 1851 and the subsequent introduction by Disderi of the Carte de Visite format in 1854 this mechanisation and division of labour within studios became essential as portraits became truly affordable to all and unlike the unique Daguerreotype could be reproduced and therefore distributed. The relative simplicity of this new process combined with the benefits of greater sensitivity to light and ability to yield negatives of high quality meant that 'tens of thousands practiced collodion portraiture, in every town and village in England and abroad'(Heyert, 1979: 83) Heyert goes on to note that the census of 1861 shows that the

number of professional photographers in England had risen from 51 to 2,534 in just ten years.

Here is a brief account of Elliot and Fry's studio in Baker Street from 1865: "There were three studios, the smallest for vignettes. The light is easterly, and the main feature is an elongated canopy stretched over the camera, 12 feet long, so that the photographer looked at the sitter through a tunnel." H. Baden Pritchard in his 1901 survey of European Studios recounts that the studio aimed to keep the sitter in the glass-house for no longer than ten minutes. A client is quoted as complaining that 'You cannot have secured a good portrait for I was only taken twice during the few minutes I was in the glass room. Usually they take ten or fifteen of me before they get it right' (Heyert, 1979: 108) This gives an indication of how commonplace and routine the procedure of photographic portraiture was becoming both for the photographer and his clients.

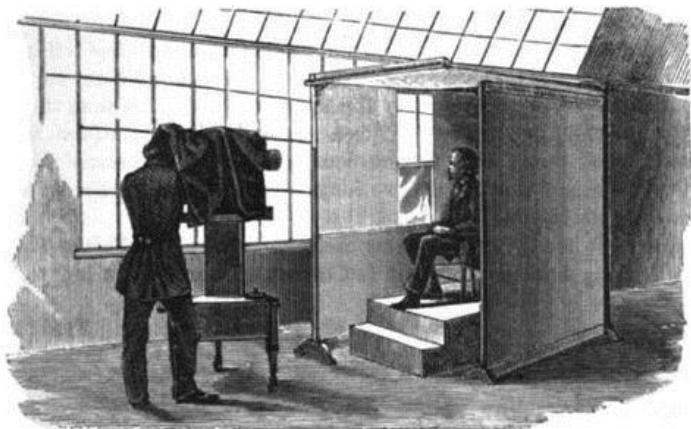


Figure 5: *Mr. E.J. Foss (Boston) 1887* (Published in "Wilson's Quarter Century in Photography. A Collection of Hints on Practical Photography which form A Complete Text-Book of the Art" by Edward L. Wilson (New York: Edward L. Wilson, 1887), p.115, fig.127)

The carte de visite not only precipitated a boom in self commissioned portraits it also offered for the first time the chance to purchase photographs of well-known figures of the day. Studios would display examples of cartes de visite both of regular clients, as examples, and of celebrities that they had photographed as cartes to be purchased. City studios, at this time, still needed to be situated on the roofs of buildings and Peter Hamilton notes that with the dramatic increase in studios 'Glasshouses became a new feature on the urban skyline' (Hamilton et al., 2001: 43). The entrances to studios were commonly just doorways between other shops at street level and the studios would advertise their presence and examples of their cartes de visite in glass showcases.

Browsing such showcases became a popular pastime, with people gathering to view photographs of the most popular celebrities of the day. A.Wynter writing in A Once A Week in 1862 observed that 'Whenever in our fashionable streets we see a crowd congregated before a shop window, there for certain a like number of notabilities are staring back at the crowd in the shape of cartes de visite.' This was a new source of income for photographers and 'to obtain a good sitter and his permission to sell his cartes de visite is in itself an annuity to a man' (Wynter, 1862: 135)

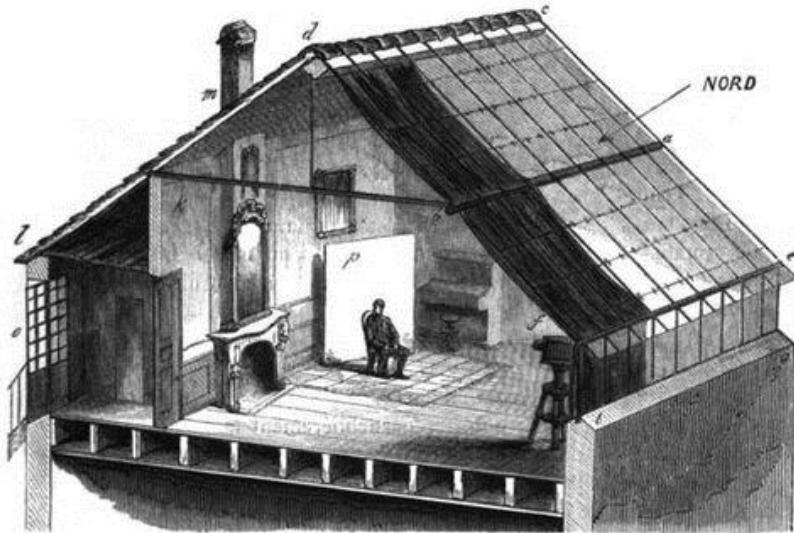


Fig. 86. — Coupe de l'atelier vitré.

Figure 6: Unidentified photographer/creator Fig. 86. - *Coupe de l'atelier vitré* [1863](#) showing the construction of a rooftop glasshouse studio.

By the 1860's studio apparatus and props had become considerably more sophisticated and often quite elaborate in comparison to those of the early Daguerreotype studios. Reproduction furniture, fake columns and balustrades, painted backdrops depicting classical interiors or landscaped gardens were all available enabling the photographer to successfully create the particular look that had become associated with the carte de visite. The settings offered by carte de visite studios were designed to reflect the social aspirations of the Victorian middle classes more than any attempt to reflect the personality of the individual sitter. Christopher Pinney notes how carte de visite portrait bear 'the dilute trace of the traditional encumbrances of painted portraiture, especially the style that has become known as the 'swagger portrait'"(Pinney, 1997: 74). This allusion to wealth and standing, signified by the columns, balustrades and depictive backdrop scenes, was more often than not quite at odds with the reality of the sitter's everyday environment. Patricia Holland notes that class differences were far less visible in such

pictures than they were in everyday life. This was not just on account of the constructed studio environment but because ‘shopkeepers, minor officials, and small traders all took themselves and their children to pose stiffly in their best clothes’ (Holland, 2004: 128)

This disparity was noted at the time in All Year Round from 1862 but the article also notes the efforts made to depict sitters in a manner that befits their profession.

‘The properties about this room too are bewildering. There are all sorts of things appropriate to all the different professions which different sitters may be expected to follow. There is a piece of complicated wheelwork for a mechanician, a pair of globes for a geographer, a nautical compass for the mariner, and a pair of compasses for a civil engineer. There too is a palette and an easel for the artist, a book for the divine, an empty brief for the lawyer, an hour-glass for the philosopher, and an inkstand and a pen with a tremendous feather in it for the author. Lastly, there is a wretched painted scene which is intended to take the public in as a landscape-background, but the honest instrument will never fall into the scheme, and hating the landscape always proclaims it for the sham it is.

This background is intended for private and non-professional persons, and there is also a pillar and a curtain – but who are those for? What is the profession of that unhappy and misguided wretch who is supposed to pass his life in a perpetual environment of pillar and curtain? There may have been persons so situated once, but now we turn our pillars into letter boxes, and the curtain draperies into ladies’ cloaks rich in festoons of crimson’ (Anonymous, 1862: 167)



Figure 7: Interior of Stafhell & Kleingrothe photographic studio in Medan, Holland 1898. From the collection of Tropenmuse, Amsterdam.

Not only were the poses and props drawn from a standard ‘semiotic typology’, catering to Victorian petit-bourgeois aspirations, the size and finish of the cartes was also standardised. This standardisation alongside public demand effectively turned the portrait studio into a factory with the entire process being broken down into discreet parts many of which could be performed by unskilled and therefore cheap labour. Even the portrait itself was often taken by an assistant or underling, with the photographer only personally attending to the more prestigious clients. Geoffrey Batchen notes that ‘By adopting mass production as its model the carte de visite transformed photography from a craft to an industry’ and that the resulting standardisation ‘marks the carte-de-visite’s radical modernity as a visual agent of capitalism.’(Batchen, 2009: 88)

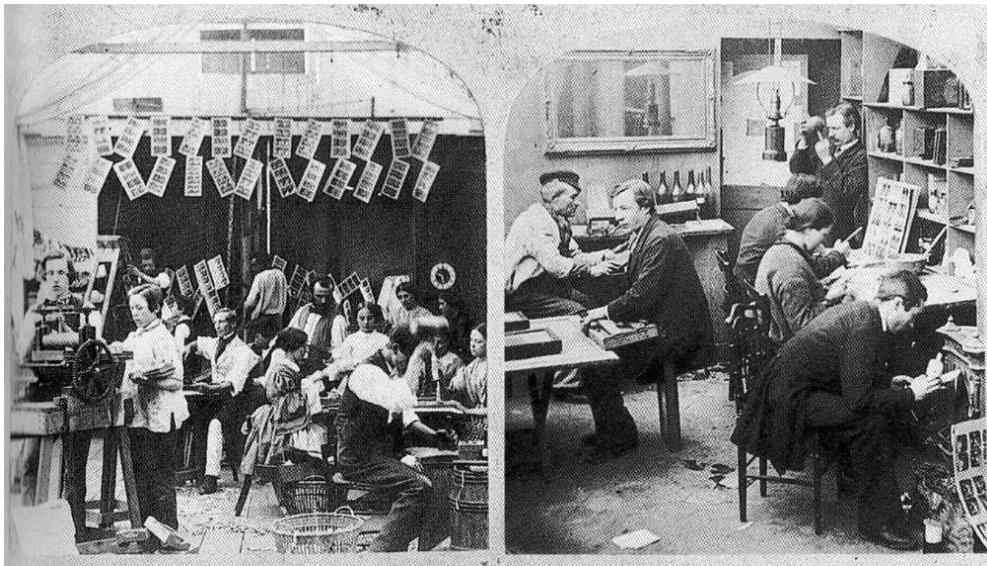


Figure 8: Behind the scenes at a busy carte de visite studio showing how the production process for cartes was divided into discreet tasks. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

This transformation also highlights the extent to which any personal aesthetic taste on the part of individual photographers could only be exercised within the limited formulaic visual language of the carte de visite format. Photographers needed to make a profit in order to survive and to do so at this time they needed to cater to public demand. Even Nadar who famously shunned the use of conventional photographic props in his early and commercially successful full plate Bohemian portraits reluctantly had to bow to the demands of the market and adopt the more run of the mill carte de visite format. Nadar's comments written in a letter to his son in 1862 reflect a disparity between the artistic aspirations of an individual photographer and the photographs he is compelled to produce through commercial necessity. 'except for a few years at the beginning, I rapidly assumed an indifference toward our profession that has not been long in changing into an aversion and then a horror' (McCauley, 1994: 101)

The popularity of the carte de visite began to wane by the middle of the 1860's and many studios that had been rapidly established to exploit the market (often borrowing capital to do so) went out of business (McCauley, 1994: 100). By the 1880's technological advances in photography and printing meant that the photographic portrait studio would never again enjoy the privileged position it had through the rapid rise of the Daguerreotype portrait to the ubiquitous carte de visite. With the introduction of the Kodak camera photography was no longer restricted to those with specialised knowledge and equipment. As Gisele Freund observes: 'Hundreds of thousands of people who had come to depend on the professional photographer for their portraits were now learning to take their own pictures' (Freund, 1980: 86) It was at this time too that the introduction of half tone plates, allowing photographs to be reproduced in newspapers, magazines and books, meant that the photographic image was no longer tethered to the professional establishments of the photographers who took them. Any novelty remaining in having an image of someone in the public eye would soon be effectively gone.

Photographic studios had to adapt to this 'renaissance in photography' (Bajac, 2002: 127) and many portraitists taking advantage of the new boom in amateur photography, began to sell photographic equipment in order to supplement their dwindling income from commissioned portraits. Many more who failed to make the necessary transitions were forced out of business by amateur photography much as the miniaturists had been by the first portrait photographers some fifty years before (Tagg, 1988: 55). Rather than a driving force in the medium's development, by 1900 commercial portraiture had become a 'limited field' with photographers being 'more dependent than ever on the taste of their clientele and obliged to work for even less money' (Freund, 1980: 88).

Risto Sarvas describes how this radically alters the business model of photography in the late nineteenth century from a situation where the studios inherent link with domestic photography became severed.⁵ This marginalisation of the domestic photographic studio is reflected within conventional accounts of the history of photography where mention of domestic portraiture beyond 1900 is conspicuously absent⁶. Domestic studio portraiture remains a widespread commercial practice but no longer enjoys the privileged position necessary to drive social and technological change with any general historic significance. Where such practices do become visible in these accounts it often takes the form of a reference to a particular photographer or studio who has been recognised, in retrospect, as having contributed an archive of sociological significance. Examples of this kind would be Mike Disfarmer in the United States, Belle Vue Studios in Bradford, or Seydou Keita in Africa; their practices being singled out as remarkable, somehow distinguished from a much larger arena that is not itself explored or otherwise represented in depth. The point here is not to disparage such attention but to illustrate its divergence from the way such practices appeared in accounts of the 19th century. What is also reflected in these examples however is the mundane and formulaic nature of the practices themselves as well as their function and importance within the local communities they serve. The image of an isolated photographer working from a small

⁵ Sarvas identifies three dominant technological paths in the history of domestic photography: The Portrait Path 1839-1888, The Kodak Path 1888-1990, and The Digital Path 1990-the present. He is careful to point out however that technology is not the single determining factor in domestic photography which can be seen as a ‘socio-technical system involving various interactions between technology, people and the social organisations in which they live and work’ (Sarvas and David, 2011: 13)

⁶ Prominent yet typical examples include Mary Warner Marien’s *Photography A Cultural History* and Graham Clarke’s *The Photograph* both of which deal at length with domestic studio portraiture in the nineteenth century but within the twentieth century emphasise portraiture that is aligned with photography as an experimental or exploratory practice with no mention of the domestic studio photograph except as an example of cultural photographic practices from Africa, India and South America. (Warner Marien, 2005: 312)

high street studio, providing a localised and predictable service for a modest fee is one that can be thought of as characterising the industry as a whole. (Lush, 1986: 167)

Portrait Studios in the 20th Century

In an article written to accompany Tata Modern's 2008 exhibition Street and Studio, Susanne Holschbach notes how the widespread use of handheld cameras by amateur photographers allowed an 'escape from the artificial world of the studio and professional photographers' adding that 'the use of snapshots ultimately made a visit to the commercial studio redundant' (Holschbach, 2008: 176)⁷. Holschbach indicates that any modernisation of the studio portrait was more evident in Africa than Europe, where it developed into a thriving culture.⁸ In Europe developments and innovations in studio practice became more associated with fashion, celebrity and society portraiture. Each of these practices had become established and developed within the domestic portrait market through the popularity of the carte de visite but quickly began to establish separate identities in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Nicholas de Ville notes how with the advent and subsequent proliferation of the carte de visite the society portrait had become 'embourgeoisie' with 'the appurtenances of rank reduced to shorthand' in the form of pillars, balustrades and other photographic props manufactured for the purpose. These rather sombre and distinctly Victorian modes of

⁷ Stephen Bull notes that even though studios became less fashionable with the middle classes in Europe and America after the invention of the Kodak camera 'some continued to be regularly used to commemorate special occasions by immigrants and the upper class' (Bull, 2009: 73). Bull cites the latter as being epitomized by the performative society portraits of Madame Yevonde.

⁸ Bull takes up this point also: 'In countries such as India and Africa portrait studios have continued to thrive, manufacturing carefully co-ordinated markers of social occasions, aspirations and achievement' (Bull 2009: 73) An example indicative of such practices will be explored alongside Christopher Pinney's analysis in a subsequent chapter.

portraiture failed to capture the spirit reflected in the emergence of glossy magazines such as *The Sketch* which sought to showcase the higher echelons of London society.(Ville, 1981: 13). A pictorial model for this ‘new mood’ could be found in the postcard portraits of actresses and music hall stars where ‘a simplicity of pose and luminescence of lighting’ began to replace fussy costumery and stilted settings. It was this more glamorous and flattering approach to portraiture, one that might offer ‘a place of heightened reality’, that began to attract the ‘professional beauties of society’(Ville, 1981: 13). This style of portraiture sought to avoid the banalities, stiffness and formal nature of the Victorian portrait emphasising instead glamour and sophistication. Its epitome was realised in the 1930’s in the work of photographers such as Cecil Beaton, Dorothy Wilding, Madame Yevonde and Lenare. Lenare’s portraits are characterised by a combination of formal simplicity and controlled artificial lighting. His subjects were often photographed against a light, plain, backdrop and lit using a combination of spotlights and moveable screens. The backdrop was frequently lit independently of the sitter and often vignettes were employed in front of the lens in order to produce ‘an arc of fade’ at the bottom of the photograph. The newfound possibilities of artificial light in the form of studio spotlights allowed photographers like Lenare and Wilding to create simple yet dramatic effects often constructing formal elements from areas of shadow or strategically placed highlights. The theatrical effects afforded through this controlled use of electric lamps utilised techniques that had been developed in the theatre and as we have seen became reflected in the postcards produced to promote their most popular players.



Figure 9: *Lady Victoria Doris Rachel Haig* by Lenare
bromide print, circa 1930
National Portrait gallery

In the United States a similarly dramatic use of artificial light was being developed as a means to photograph and promote Hollywood movie stars. Here we see the utilisation of lighting techniques derived from the theatres of Broadway and developed in relation to the particularities of film exposure within the relatively new but rapidly expanding movie industry. Time Life's 1972 volume dedicated to the studio notes that 'Learning to use the flood lamp was the movie's single most important breakthrough in studio techniques' freeing photographers from the flat monotonous illumination afforded by the daylight studio (Time-Life., 1972: 56). The Hollywood portrait, like the more adventurous society portraits, sought to create an alternate reality and often sought to emphasize the mythic, even god-like, qualities of the actors depicted. This was achieved through the controlled play of light, radically stylised cropping and the adoption of a characteristic and intense

gaze derived from the dramatic use of the close up that had become a convention of Hollywood movies.⁹



Figure 10: Ruth Harriet Louise
Greta Garbo, publicity still for The Mysterious Lady 1928 Garbo - Portraits from Her Private Collection by S. Reisfield & R. Dance

⁹ John Kobal identifies two predominant types of image in the thousands of movie star portraits taken in the 1920's and 30's; the 'inward gazing' and the 'outward looking'. Kobal identifies the former with a profound god like quality of 'true immortals' such as Garbo, Valentino and Dietrich the inward gaze reflecting an inner world of their own to which mere mortals could only transcend through death.. The latter, the 'outward looking' he sees as the 'mediators between the remote mortals and ourselves' a look epitomised in photographs of the young Cary Grant during the 1930's. Kobal notes that 'Inward or outward we respond instinctively to these archetypes; they are larger than life' (Kobal, 1980: 29)



Figure 11: Ted Allen *Cary Grant* bromide print, 1936 National Portrait Gallery

We have wandered, you will no doubt have noticed, a long way from the domestic studio here; there are two reasons for this. Firstly it demonstrates the paths taken by studio portraiture as it diverged from its domestic moorings and embraced the new possibilities afforded by artificial studio lighting. Secondly the influence of these developments start to become apparent in many of the photographs produced in less prestigious commercial domestic studios. These studios began to adopt artificial lighting as it became more practical, affordable and desirable; allowing them to emulate, and therefore offer to clients, some of the looks associated with the celebrity and society portraits that populated the pages of glossy magazines. A domestic portrait photograph taken anytime from the 1930's to the 1960's might typically display a plain background, often graduated through the strategic deployment of artificial light. It may also be tightly cropped into the face, include some rim or back lighting on the hair and the sitter might be gazing intently into an imagined distance and away from the camera. None of these elements would be

evident in the typical late Victorian studio portrait; they are far more consistent with the developments in studio practice that we have identified in celebrity and society portraiture.^{10 11}

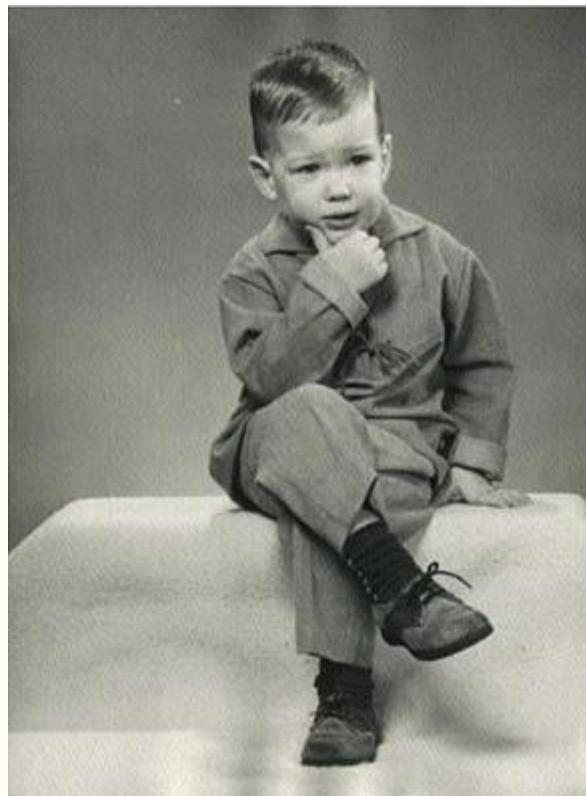


Figure 12: Frank Pease *Child Portrait* c.1950 reproduced in *La Porte, Indiana* edited by Jason Bitner

¹⁰ An excellent example of these elements in mid-20th century domestic portraiture can be found in Jason Bitner's found collection of studio portraits from a studio in La Porte, Indiana spanning a period from the 1940's to the 1960's. (Bitner, 2006)

¹¹ Max Kosloff observes that the glamour that radiates from Hollywood portraits is not endowed with any ability to touch us 'it is not the same thing as the human allure of people who had improvised, innocently, hopefully or nervously what they imagined as a befitting image of themselves, often under trying conditions.' Rather it is 'self-enclosed never a response to a social reality....The portrait of the Hollywood star functions as a motif of desire' (Kozloff, 2007: 156). Domestic portraits can rarely appear self-enclosed in this way and the reality of the ordinary becomes exaggeratedly apparent if the language of the movie star portrait is overly employed.

The developments in studio lighting that become evident in domestic portraits within the first few decades of the twentieth century not only reflect technological development and stylistic change they also signal a change in the physical space of the studio itself. The natural light hitherto fundamental to the studio was no longer an essential requirement. Studios that were once characterised by architectural features such as glass roofs and large banks of windows rapidly became a thing of the past. In fact the versatility afforded by artificial light and the aesthetic choices that this allowed often necessitated that natural light be removed altogether. Studios became far less likely to incorporate uncovered windows or skylights in their makeup and the apparatus of studio lighting stands and trailing cables soon became a ubiquitous feature. The redundancy of natural light for the photographic studio is evidenced in a Time Life guide to 'setting up' a studio published in 1972. The article and accompanying diagram deals at length with the relative size of a suitable space and the suggested arrangement of equipment within it; including lights, backdrop, sink, telephone and even the door. There are no windows pictured in the diagram. The absence of any discussion within the article about natural light or the potential presence of windows within the prospective space would seem to indicate that their lack of relevance to studio portraiture by the early 1970's had become a matter of course. (Time-Life., 1972)

The picturing of studio flash equipment in this article demonstrates a further development in studio photography, one that contributed to the adaptability of almost any space into a studio. The continuous electric lights that developed throughout the first half of the twentieth century began to be replaced by newly developed electronic studio

flash units by the late 1960's¹². Continuous incandescent lighting needed to be powerful in order to afford enough illumination for photographic exposure; it also, however, generated a lot of heat. This meant that studio sittings would often be uncomfortable for all concerned. Continuous illumination also made the procedure challenging for the model who more often than not would be subjected to the full glare of the lights for a considerable time. Flash, by offering the cooler running of lower powered modelling lights combined with a greatly extended control over exposure settings, created a studio environment that was both more comfortable and more versatile.

A further technical development that is worthy of mention is the widespread adoption of colour for domestic studio photographs which began during the 1960's and was commonplace by the late 1970's¹³. One company that prominently marketed the use of colour at this time was the large American portrait photography franchise Olan Mills who switched from black and white in the mid 1960's; a move that proved instrumental in their subsequent success.¹⁴ This success and subsequent visibility meant that the Olan Mills portrait style became widely recognised. Its innovative use of colour, however, was not mirrored in its pictorial style which favoured a more traditional look. Making use of scenic backdrops and accompanying props Olan Mills portraits often pictured families

¹² The Time Life article lists both continuous and flash lighting noting that the flash although cooler to run, longer lasting and unsurpassed for stopping motion is still a more expensive option. (Time-Life, 1972: 186)

¹³ Colour had begun to be used for studio portraiture in the 1930's perhaps most notably by Madame Yevonde who made use of the now obsolete Vivex process. This proved particularly effective in her famous society portraits in which she depicted her sitters as Greek gods and goddesses. It would be a further 30 years however before colour started to become widely adopted for domestic portraiture.

¹⁴ 'More technical advances followed in the 1960s, in particular the switch to all-colour photographic work. The company took the old four-way sliding back approach of the 1940s and applied it to a new two-way camera, which could use a 70-millimeter film magazine split between black and white and colour film. The results were proofs in both black and white and colour. However, the colour results from the camera proved to be so outstanding that the company chose to drop black and white and devote itself entirely to colour photography.' (Mills 2004)

formally arranged within constructed bucolic environments a convention reminiscent of the cartes de visite of the nineteenth century. Olan Mills went on to launch an operation in the United Kingdom in 1981 and throughout the 1980's their portrait studios became a common feature of high streets across the country.(Mills, 2004). The widespread presence of Olan Mills studios presented a new challenge for the independent studios that we have identified as characteristic of the domestic portrait industry. This will have accelerated the widespread adoption of colour as a standard medium for portraiture but it did not however provide a forward looking model in terms of style. The Olan Mill's group in being a self-proclaimed Christian organisation from the United States can be argued to have presented a particular set of moral values through their portraiture. Their commercial success and aggressive marketing ensured that these values became powerfully asserted through the Olan Mills studios and undoubtedly found a certain resonance with sections of the middle classes within Thatcher's Britain. Consequently Olan Mills did little to further the stylistic developments that we have identified as having drawn (albeit in diluted form) from the newly emerging tropes of fashion and celebrity portraiture.¹⁵ Their presence through the 80's and 90's in Britain seemed to mark as much the stagnation and backward looking nature of the industry, albeit with a cheesy American twist, as any positive generative force. Olan Mill's subsequent decline through the nineties in the UK can be viewed as a reflection on their somewhat dated persona. It can also be seen as symptomatic of the industry as a whole, a situation reported in an article that appeared in the British Journal of Photography in 1998. The article summarised the findings of an industry led survey that revealed that the services offered by portrait studios were commonly perceived as out of touch and unable to reflect the

¹⁵ It seems somehow ironic that the use of colour, once marking the apogee of style in the society portraits of Yevonde, became widespread through a mode of portraiture that owes almost nothing to the other stylistic advances of the society portrait genre.

changing needs of the domestic market. (Berger, 1998) This article and others from this period will become the object of a more detailed analysis towards the end of this chapter.

Some thoughts on Foucault

We have, thus far, traced a fairly straightforward account of the development of the photographic portrait studio; from its rapid development through the 19th century to its more marginalised and static position in the latter part of the 20th; providing a kind of ‘view from above’. For us to inhabit Kracauer’s ‘anteroom’ we need now to supplement this with some more focused studies which serve to remind us of the co-existence of this general overview with the particulars of quotidian practice.

By applying what Foucault termed an archaeological approach, in these studies, we can begin to see things from a different perspective, one that would register or acknowledge the institutions and discourses within which they are set to work. For Foucault objects and documents, which he terms statements, can be examined to reveal the discourse that is constituted by them. The discourse is not something set in history as a formal *a priori* but is determined by these statements as what Foucault calls a *historical a priori* of what is actually said about a particular practice at a particular time. For Foucault ‘to analyse a discursive formation....is to deal with a group of verbal performances at the level of the statements and of the form of positivity that characterizes them, or more briefly it is to define the type of positivity of a discourse.’ (Foucault, 2002: 141) The unity of this positivity is what determines the historical *a priori*. What Foucault seeks to avoid with

this approach is any fixed or given meaning; any reference to interiority or any point of origin. Instead he describes fragmented figures, the dispersion of exteriority and the specific forms of an accumulation. Rather than an interpretation, Foucault seeks to establish a limited space of communication within which the positivity (collection of statements) of a discourse takes place.

Several writers have analysed aspects of 19th century portraiture using a Foucauldian model, each viewing it as a discursive practice in order to broaden out and challenge the autonomy of conventional photographic history. It will be useful to briefly examine the work of Tagg, Alvani and Stephen Edwards in this field not just as a way of analysing their approach to photographic portraiture as a discursive practice but also in determining how useful it might be to view contemporary commercial portraiture in these terms and further to this in viewing the studio itself as a discursive formation.

Suren Alvani examines 19th century portraiture in order to determine how photography functioned to socially constitute the bourgeois body ‘providing it meaning within an established hierarchy of values’ (Alvani, 1996: 41). Alvani argues that whilst photography allowed portraiture to fall within economic reach of the masses it could also be viewed as a ‘dominant discourse’ in the form of a system of representation with its own specific rules that portrayed individual bodies as types. In recounting Foucault Alvani notes that ‘power enters deeply into the gestures, actions, and discourses of everyday lives’ and that photography, ‘existing within a set of ideological discourses and constraints invests the body in power relations within which it is forced to emit signs’. (Alvani, 1996: 44). He lists three sites as being essential to the hegemony of nineteenth century bourgeois society and within which photographic representations

framed the body: the nation state, the family and the individual. He also asks within which discourses photography instantiates the body to be portrayed? Here he identifies the pseudo sciences of phrenology and physiognomy, with their privileging of the exterior of the body as an indicator of class and morality. For Lalvani photography in the 19th century was mobilised in making visible the bourgeois body within a socially hierarchical discourse based on appearance.

In similar fashion Lalvani points to the significance of photography in affirming the ideology of the middle class family; noting that the consistency of grouping, pose, expression and format in family portraits makes them at once unremarkable and at the same time reveals underlying ideological conventions within which individual families become a singular representational type.

As for the studio Lalvani appropriates Alan Trachtenberg's descriptions of a space where the 'ground of intelligibility' or 'regime of sense' of portraiture takes place. He observes that even though a 19th century portrait photographer would have been concerned with disclosing character he was in fact merely in possession of 'a set of physiognomic typologies' with which he replicated the examples in the reception room. 'The cycle is complete and thus a new image enters the symbolic order of the portrait as public self, signified and encoded by a system of conventionalised signs.' (Lalvani, 1996: 68) The studio and its props construct spaces that metonymically connote leisure and cultivation. Subjects within these spaces are allowed to become visible within the context of their social aspirations (the constructed space, pose and manner of dress) but this occurs within an ideologically binding system that will discursively produce them as objects of that visibility. (Lalvani, 1996: 69) The space in front of the camera is a privileged site and

power emanates from it. The studio forms not just a location but an apparatus through which this emanation of power is realised and mediated in the production of visibility.

In many ways Alvani's analysis of domestic portraiture of the 19th century draws from Tagg's writing where photography is implicated 'as an apparatus of ideological control.'(Durden, 2013: 235) Tagg maps the conditions and discourses within which the meanings of photographs became conventionalised within newly emerging institutions of the 19th century. In doing so he demonstrates that 'the 'medium' of photography was not given or unified but was always 'a function of a specific apparatus or machine in the sense in which Foucault used these terms'(Tagg, 2009: xxviii) Tagg, however, explains that there is an ambivalence to his phrase 'burden of representation' in that it doesn't only imply a burden in the sense of an unwelcome intrusion by institutions or even a sense of responsibility to be representative. It is also 'that which is born of representation, representations burden, precisely a meaning' (Tagg, 2009: xxiv). The effects of this burden are what account for the loss of the 'aura' that Benjamin identifies in very early portraiture (Benjamin, 1972: Vol 2 372, Benjamin, 1931: 207); the result not just of a slowness of process but also of an innocence in front of the camera free from this 'burden' of meaning that would soon come to complicate the nature of modern subjectivity.

Alan Sekula identifies the opposing discourses of science and aesthetics that surround photography as producing a double system; one that is capable of functioning both honorifically and repressively (Sekula, 1986). A photographic portrait can show both subjectivity in the sitter whilst simultaneously objectifying them as a particular social type or class. As with Tagg, Sekula contends that there is no inherent meaning in a

photograph, meaning is imposed from the outside ‘attached to a cacophony of competing discourses’(Batchen, 1999: 9)

Steven Edwards’ criticism of Tagg and Sekula is that they too readily turn to photographs that are unquestionably repressive in order to substantiate their claims. In doing this, he argues, they ‘risk missing the mass of everyday images that perform so much signifying work.’(Edwards, 2006: 18) and that this might have the effect of rendering the profession of photography itself invisible, causing ‘middle class bodies [to] disappear as a result’. Edwards’ attempts to redress this situation by concentrating on the everyday practices of English commercial portrait photographers operating in the 1860’s. It is Edward’s detailed (and essentially Foucauldian) analysis of one particularly relevant aspect of these practices that will provide us with our ‘ground level’ view which we can set against our more general survey. It will also provide the model for our own analysis of a comparable aspect of contemporary domestic portrait practices occurring much later at the beginning of the 21st century.

A discursive view of the photographers’ studio in the nineteenth century

Edwards singles out a series of debates that surfaced in the photographic press in the 1860’s around the use of photographic backgrounds and studio props. He identifies a general concern being expressed, in articles appearing in Quarterly Review and The Photographic News in the 1850’s and 60’s, about the ‘abuse of the incongruous materials composing many of the backgrounds used in photographic portraiture’ which was ‘one fact more loud than another in expressing the absence of artistic culture’ (Edwards, 2006: 248). In a series of articles titled ‘Backgrounds- How to Paint and Arrange Them’ in The

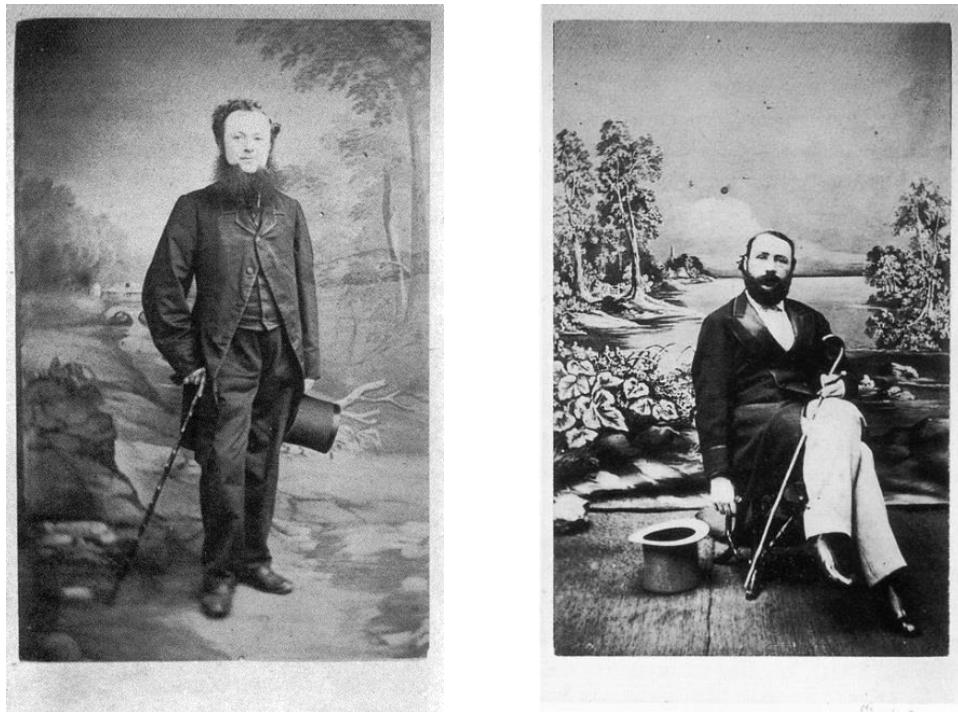
Photographic News during 1859-60 the writer expressed the importance of making sure that the background and props used in a portrait are appropriate to the sitter's role or profession and that they blend seamlessly in order to create a coherent pictorial illusion. Edwards notes that when these things did not happen then unwanted attention was called to the 'ideological space of the studio' which 'brought forth resentment.' The articles warned about the 'dragging in of figures into scenes in which they have no business and they do nothing but mischief'. (Edwards, 2006: 251)

Edwards identifies the term 'incongruity' as being central to debates on photographic backgrounds at this time but he also links this to the Victorian concept of the 'grotesque' which is characterised by form that was fragmented and incoherent; lacking in the unity of nature (Edwards, 2006: 262). This is useful for our own enquiry in that it starts to give a sense of the photographers' studio as a rather strange contradictory space. The understandable anxieties elicited by early daguerreotype studios have become replaced by something far more insidious and complex here, something that appears symptomatic of a rapidly developing modernity: a modernity in which the photographic image becomes increasingly implicated in the constitution of subjectivity.

Edwards draws parallels with Mary Shelley's contemporaneous novel Frankenstein, noting how Frankenstein cannot escape the monster he has created. This monster, made up of many disparate parts, is figured as an aspect of Frankenstein himself and always seems to appear and cause disruption wherever he goes. The disparate parts that constitute the photographic studio, in refusing to yield easily to the aesthetic aspirations of the photographer, similarly threaten to appear and cause disruption. As Edwards puts it 'Photographic space and compositional arrangements cannot easily be fitted into the

academic conception.' (Edwards, 2006: 264) The studio here becomes a space characterised by incongruity and mismatched figurations that seem to be both created through and represented by the photographic apparatus. These complex ambiguities are also suggested by Walter Benjamin writing on the 1860's studio: 'At that time arose the ateliers with their draperies and palms, gobelins and easels, which stand so ambivalently between execution and representation, torture chamber and throne room...' (Benjamin, 1931: 206) Edwards notes how 'The studio wrapped around bourgeois persons. No less than the admixtures of human parts with those of fish or animals, the bodies of these middle-class sitters became components of a larger grotesque construction. The background compromised the bounded, individual bourgeois sitter.' (Edwards, 2006: 270) .

Edwards' analysis fixes on fractures in the discursive formation of the studio, fractures that allow him to create a picture of the complex class structures within which the nineteenth century portrait photographer operated. For our purposes the grotesque figurations that created these fractures also figure the studio space itself as unusual and somehow complicit in these affects. A brief analysis of a more recent yet remarkably similar series of articles will provide a useful point of comparison here; allowing us to consider if and how these figurations might persist within the space of the modern studio.



Figures 13 and 14: Anonymous carte de visite portrait and B.C. Paice carte de visite (inscribed “? M.P. for Windsor” on back). Reproduced in Stephen Edwards’ *Allegories, the making of English photography* in order to illustrate the incongruous use of studio backdrops.

A discursive view of the photographers' studio from the beginning of the 21st Century.

A number of articles that appeared in the UK photographic press between 1990 and 2010 reflect an event that marked a very real change in the domestic studio portrait industry. This event was the launch of a new company who, through the introduction of a seemingly radical new form of domestic studio portraiture, generated discussions that brought to light discourses that can be argued to underpin the industry. This company launch and the accompanying articles allow a glimpse of how studio photographers viewed themselves in relation to matters of taste and style in the late 20th century; offering a fascinating comparison to Edward’s analysis of the 19th century photographic press. Where these earlier articles reflected an ongoing concern within the industry, these

newer articles mark a point of change; one that has affected the sensibilities and working practices of domestic studio photographers throughout the industry in the UK.

During the 1990's the British Journal of Photography published a number of disparate articles on the state of domestic portraiture in the UK. One of these entitled *Pretty as a Picture* from 1995 presented a mini study of established domestic portrait photographers aimed at finding out what kind of images were most requested by their customers. The article concluded that 'families and children photographed in the studio are by far the most popular type of requested portrait.' (Lee, 1995: 11) This was as opposed to single females, pets, location portraits and business executives.¹⁶ The photographs used to illustrate this article can be taken as indicative of the kinds of domestic portraiture that was being practiced in the UK at this time. What is notable about these images is how closely they adhere to the conventions established during the 19th century, the people are plainly not Victorian, but the poses, settings and props, apart from appearing in colour, appear remarkably consistent with their earlier counterparts. One portrait shows a family group centrally placed and formally arranged in front of a dark cloth backdrop, another depicts a small child posed smiling at the camera on a white fur rug. The article did not make a point of these apparent anachronisms but an article some three years later indicates a growing awareness of the portrait industry as having a somewhat old fashioned image.

¹⁶ What is worthy of note here is that there is no mention of a single male portrait, only 'business executive' (gender not specified) which appears in the lowest bracket of popularity. This is a very different picture to the relative popularity of both male and female single portraits produced as carte de visite in the 19th century. The importance of the studio as a means to represent the social and professional standing of individuals has largely disappeared whereas the studio portrait as a means to reinforce family values and represent the social standing of the family within the domestic environment has remained intact to a far greater degree.



Figure 15: Family Studio Portrait from 1995 used to illustrate the BJP article *Pretty as a Picture*

In 1998 the BJP reported a ‘psychological consumer study’ of the portrait market carried out by Agfa aimed at ‘investigating whether barriers for the further development of the portrait market in Europe exist’(Berger, 1998: 23) This showed that despite a desire to have ‘professional photographs of oneself or of one’s family’ there were significant barriers that lead consumers to shun the services of a professional. First, there was a conception that ‘a portrait photograph had no place in daily life’ and was ‘connected with only a few classic occasions’. Second, on describing the finished portrait, ‘many customers stated that they could not satisfactorily see themselves in the photograph’ a statement qualified in the article as ‘A great ambivalence when looking at a photograph of oneself where one does not appear as one would like to’. Third, it was thought that a

visit to a photographic studio was or would be a negative experience comparable to a visit to the dentist. Fourth, and finally, a professional portrait was considered to be too expensive.(Berger, 1998: 23) The first two points highlighted by this study are interesting not least for their rather vague and obtuse descriptions of quite philosophical concepts around notions of the represented self and the place and meaning of images within domestic experience. The inference here is that the conception of the studio and the professional portrait that is produced within it are at odds with how people see themselves and by extension how they would like to be represented. Although not stated in the article there is a sense that the visual language that defines the look of portraiture at this time is conceived as irrelevant and not capable of representing a modern subject effectively. The article shies away from drawing this conclusion merely offering a vague suggestion to the professional photographer to make portrait photography more desirable to young target groups with ‘attractive offers’. It was undoubtedly not within the BJPs interests to damn the entire portrait industry as being stuck in the past at this point with no clear vision of a way forward. It is telling however that a portrait accompanying the article which had won first prize in the Agfa European Portrait Awards 1998 was described as a ‘modern portrait in a strident techno atmosphere’ and was praised as being a ‘model example of photographic language understood by the young generation and which will open up many new customer groups for portrait photography’. (Berger, 1998: 23)

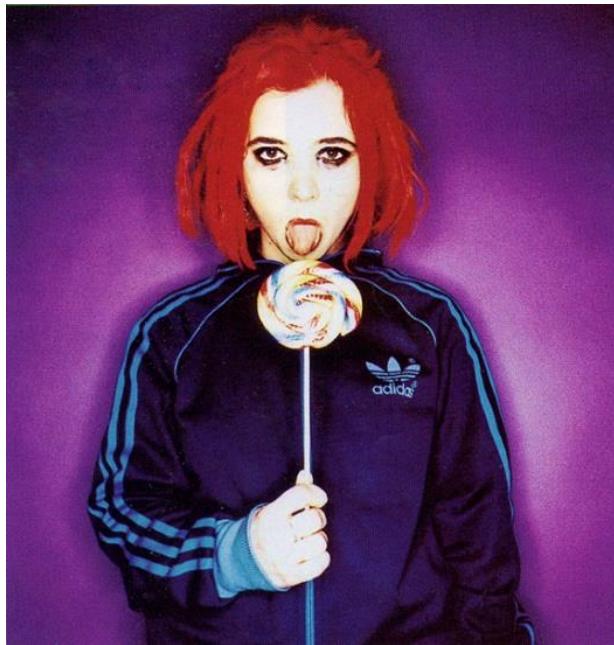
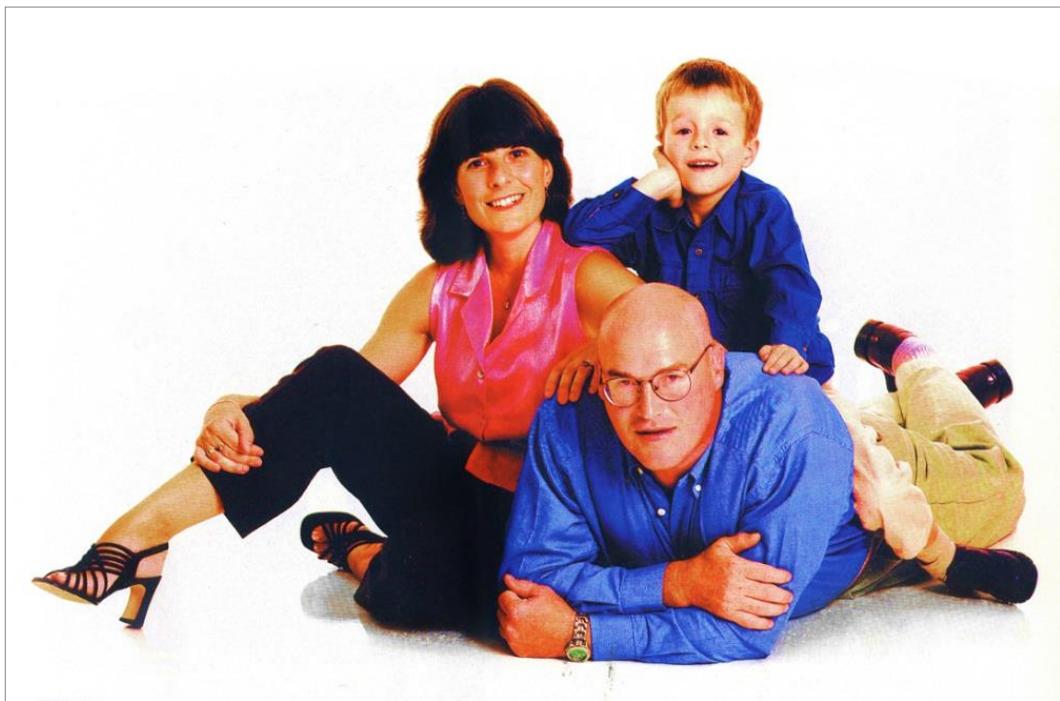
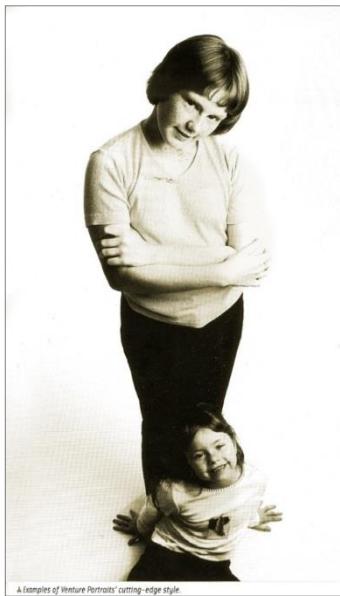


Figure 16: Winner of the 1998 Agfa European Portrait Awards. Featured in the BJP article *Shot from the Heart* 1998.

In January 2001 an article in the British Journal of Photography begins by similarly describing ‘a portrait/social market in decline, an entire industry with no direction, 4000 disparate (and in some cases desperate) studios, many of them worried where the next portrait was coming from’(Lansdown, 2001: 11). This was not however the prelude to another call to arms but rather the introduction for a cover feature on Brian Glover Smith a British entrepreneur and photographer who in 2000 launched a new studio franchise company called Venture. With Venture, Glover hoped to realise his ambition to revolutionise the commercial portrait photography market in the UK. His approach was to adopt a visual style that was self-consciously modern and to deliberately assert a radical departure from established traditions of portraiture. ‘A Venture portrait is a form of expression that captures the spirit and the essence of the subject. It could be an image with a lot of blur and movement in it, even an out of focus shot or something wacky with a wide angle lens...Venture customers don’t knock on the door for safe portraits ...we leave those for traditional photographers’(Glover-Smith quoted in Lansdown, 2001: 11). The article is illustrated with several portraits demonstrating the

Venture style; two of children and three of family groups. Whether these images capture any spirit or essence of the subjects is questionable but it is worth noting that each one is shot in a plain seamless white studio space and characterised by what can be described as a quirkiness of style; a deliberately playful subversion of the conventions of family portraiture. Some are black and white, some exaggeratedly saturated colour, one includes movement blur, one is panoramic in format and includes figures at, and half cropped by, the extreme edges of the frame, and one shows a child attempting a headstand in a striped armchair, his face being entirely obscured.





A Examples of Venture Portraits' cutting-edge style.



Figures 17 - 20: Examples of the Venture Portrait style used to illustrate the British Journal of Photography article *White Light* 2001.

The tone of this article can be described as celebratory and almost promotional rather than analytical or impartial.¹⁷ For our purposes however this article marks an acknowledgment within the professional photographic press that there is a rekindled debate around matters of taste, style and technique relating to the domestic studio portrait and the photographers who produce them. However politely, or couched in the rhetoric of self-promotion, these debates appear in public, they still serve to make visible the everyday concerns of the portrait photographer, especially in relation to matters of taste and style. Portrait photographers who are not Venture portrait photographers are defined within this rhetoric as traditional and as such are conveyed as not having anything to offer: 'What future is there for a photographer who has worked hard for

¹⁷ Indeed the writer Trevor Lansdown is credited in a footnote as being the public relations consultant for Kodak Professional; a fact of particular relevance in that Venture is described in the article as 'a Kodak supported nationwide portrait studio franchise business'. The Kodak logo appears on all of Venture's advertising from this period.

years running a High Street shop where the industry is in decline and interest in the product is minimal....?' Glover-Smith proclaims.(Lansdown, 2001: 12)

Some fourteen years on, we can see that Venture's launch did indeed force a big change in domestic portraiture in the UK. The Venture style described by the BJP as 'high key portraits taken against bright white background'(Smyth, 2006: 17) became adopted by many of the 'traditional' photographers who found themselves in a position of having to adapt to survive. In 2006 the BJP noted that the Venture style 'caught on' and was widely practiced by 'many portrait photographers...as any internet search makes clear' (Smyth, 2006). A Dublin based photographer who adopted this style in 2003 is quoted: 'It's nice to have bright colours with the white background...and it's more popular with clients. They're more fashion conscious and it's a style they see in fashion magazines.'¹⁸ This appears to replay the shift that we have identified as having occurred one hundred years earlier when society portrait photographers began appropriating the more glamorous look emerging in promotional portraits of theatre stars in order to escape the overly formal and fussy look of the carte de visite and cabinet card styles of the late nineteenth century. Similarly here the style of portraits offered within the industry is perceived as stuffy and out of touch; the earlier stylistic nod to celebrity portraiture itself now seemed stayed and stilted and the proliferation of conservative, overly fussy colour portraiture epitomised by Olan Mills through the later decades of the twentieth century added up to

¹⁸ The description of 'bright colours with the white background' as being linked with fashion imagery does not necessarily reflect that these elements in themselves were unprecedented within the history of domestic portraiture. Some of the earliest 19th century portraits, most notably those by Nadar, included a plain uncluttered background but, as Edwards notes, this was not a practice that persisted except in France. An exchange in *The Photographic News* characterised the emptiness and plainness of French backgrounds as presenting a scene of 'utter desolation' and that the eye required some form of composition. It was noted however that even French backgrounds were 'filled up with shadows'. The use of plain backgrounds in commercial portraiture is in fact evident from all periods with varying degrees of popularity and application but generally appearing as a gradation of tones achieved through effects of lighting rather than a stark void.

an industry that seemed to have little new to offer. In summing up this situation Howard Lipman, Venture's 'photography development director' seems to disregard any stylistic changes of the twentieth century: 'Photography had been around for 160 years and portrait photographers were using the same basic set up – a chaise longue against a mottled brown background...We wanted to change that. It was driven by our clients. They didn't necessarily know what they wanted but they knew they didn't want that. They didn't want imitation old masters' (Smyth, 2006: 17)

This is a telling statement not just about Venture, the company, but in how it defines the state of portraiture at this time and how it pictures the potential client and their aspirations. This is obviously a statement which benefits from the advantage of hindsight and employs a degree of hyperbole but none the less its description of how portraits had remained essentially the same for 160 years is revealing. The painted backdrop was indeed still there, albeit distilled from numerous landscapes into its lowest common denominator; a 'mottled brown background', and so was the chair, the pillar and the myriad of other props now condensed into a 'chaise longue'. These may be generalisations but for this statement to be effective within the rhetoric of a company exalting its virtues within a professional photographic publication it would have needed to ring true with the magazines readership and therefore be based on widely held conceptions of truth about portraiture within the industry. It certainly appears consistent with the situation we have seen described and pictured in the British Journal of Photography in the last decade of the twentieth century.

This description also shows us that the domestic portrait photograph is still being located within the discourse of art history and in particular that of painting. The term 'old

masters' can be interpreted as referring to a modernist and populist conception of oil painting, characterised by figurative, honorific depictions of status and wealth and a validity as art bolstered by an academic tradition based on elitism and connoisseurship.

The debates illuminated by Edwards around photographer's inattentiveness to academic traditions of painting in the 19th century have here been reduced to a generalised observation; implying that portrait photographers in the late 20th century whilst not engaged in the same debates have somehow failed to move away from the Victorian aesthetic formulas around which they revolved. The sense of grotesque identified by Edwards in relation to the 19th century studio seems to have persisted here.

Photographers may have sought to simplify the fussy and stilted conventions that characterised the Victorian studio but within the more generic tropes of the late twentieth century portrait studio there still echoes a sense of the grotesquely incongruous. Indeed it might be argued that that the mismatches between sitter and pictured setting and the lack of concern for formal or aesthetic integrity have become the persistent and defining characteristics of much commercial portraiture. Benjamin's analogy of the studio as 'torture chamber' and the more recent analogy of a 'visit to the dentist' seem to resonate with a particular contiguity here. The typologies that Lalvani describes as simply being replayed by the 19th century photographer have become so homogenised¹⁹ that a sense of coercion is virtually inevitable in relation to the modern

¹⁹ In an essay from the mid 1980's Donald Lush noted that 'From one town to another and across national borders it is by no means hard to find a "High Street" photography studio with a window full of pictures virtually interchangeable with the work of any similar studio' (Lush, 1986) The title of this essay: *The White Rug*, refers to the convention of using a white furry mat on which to photograph children, which seems to embody a conventionalising in commercial portraiture where diversity is reduced to an end product that is resolutely similar and seems to deny any variety of social background, class or experience both on the part of the photographer or the sitter. Lush identifies this standardisation as being used as a sign of "professional photography". The white rug, the standardised 'sitting side-on' pose, the navy blue backdrop and the print itself presented in a brown and gold gatefold cardboard mount were all used to connote 'hard work, long hours and specialised training'. Lush doesn't touch upon the history of painting in explaining these conventions for him they simply reflect the ideology and institution of professional photography as being 'a way of selling a product by dressing it in particular values'.

studio yet at the same time so vague and generalised that it becomes no more than an expected component of the apparatus as a whole rather than a particular incongruity of form or class.

The style of portraiture introduced by Venture is in itself nothing particularly innovative and as we have seen is readily identifiable, even by those practitioners who have sought to emulate it, as having borrowed its look from the world of fashion. The use of a plain white background appears in different guises throughout the history of portraiture but its pronounced starkness here recalls the fashion images pioneered by Richard Avedon and Irving Penn in the 1950's; a look that has become a mainstay of the fashion industry²⁰.

The conflation of a pictorial style primarily intended to emphasise sexuality and desire with an industry that traditionally privileges family values may seem radical and even somewhat anarchic but is not entirely dissimilar to the earlier incorporation of the tropes of celebrity portraiture.²¹ In reality the Venture look tends towards a rather uncomfortable mix of forced sentimentality and spontaneity that betrays the inconsistencies of adopted style and intended market.²² The fetishising sexuality inherent

²⁰ In the mid to late 1940's Richard Avedon, whilst working for Harper's Bazaar, developed a style where all context and extraneous detail is replaced by empty white space as a way to 'focus attention on the psychological interaction between himself and his female subjects' (Vettel-Becker, 2005: 90) Irving Penn photographing for American Vogue also adopted this approach but introduced a more radical modernist aesthetic where his models were depicted as abstract shapes within the white space and often dissected by the edge of the frame. Often in Penn's photographs even the model's skin is shown as pure white with features such as lips and eyes becoming more important as abstract formal elements than any depiction of an individual. In these self-consciously stylised images everything is removed except for the signifiers of a particular view of female sexuality; one in which woman, clothes and image meld into an object of desire and fantasy.

²¹ Susanne Holschbach summarises the difference between the pose associated with fashion and that of domestic portraiture: 'The art of fashion photography is, of course, also based on the pose, but this pose is no longer tied to a person in particular and their self-expression, since the model is nothing but an accidental personification.' (Holschbach, 2008: 175)

²² The application of stylistic elements from advertising and fashion into depictions of domesticity is apparent in celebrity magazines such as Hello and Ok! that started to appear in the UK in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Patricia Holland describes these publications as revealing 'the indiscretions and private moments of the well-known and not so well-known with an appealing gloss, using photographic styles which range from the captured paparazzi shot to the formal portrait, as well as the hyperrealism of

within fashion work, when replaced with the sentimentality necessary to the signification of family values, particularly those aiming to convey playful unity, creates a particularly vapid result. Incongruity it seems is something that the commercial portrait photographer finds hard to avoid. Here the incongruities of the 19th century apparatus have been replaced by others that in their own way appear equally grotesque. This is a more contemporary grotesque; one still bound up with notions of class and aesthetics yet now characterised by a stark white studio backdrop; a setting that only seems to accentuate the space of the studio itself as somehow complicit in these affects.

We have begun to get an idea of the portrait studio here as a space and an apparatus that embodies a very particular set of qualities, qualities that whilst explicitly social and cultural seem to implicitly suggest a sense of unease for the subjects that become positioned within them. The discursive fractures that have helped us to identify the social

contemporary fashion photography' She observes that 'Something of this luscious colourful imagery can be seen reflected in family pictures of the 'post-photography' era. (Holland, 2004: 157) Further to this Holland also suggests that there is a general acceptance at the beginning of the 21st century that the conception of a two parent, two child Western family is no longer regarded as the norm and that the many variations that make up the modern family have been made publicly visible as never before through such magazines.

Within the context of these magazines the status of celebrity is both celebrated and undermined. The self-contained nature of cinematic portraiture in perpetuating the myth of celebrity is set against the paparazzi shots that seek to reveal the flawed individual. In between these two extremes are the magazines own photo shoots that often depict celebrities together with their families in their homes or in the studio. It is here that the public status of celebrity is pictured within the more private domestic realm of the family but the visual language used here is closer to that of the fashion shoot than that of the domestic snap or of documentary journalism. The celebrity, their family and their home are collapsed into a commoditized spectacle within the pages of the magazine. This has a double effect in that not only do the children and spouses of the celebrities become elevated within this space but the space itself, the hyperreal space of fashion and advertising becomes a space in which real individuals rather than stars or models can be portrayed. The service that Venture offered allowed a visual representation of the individual and the family that had become familiar through such magazines to become available through the medium of domestic portraiture.

The picturing of the modern family in such a way can be viewed in similar terms to depictions of the 19th century family. In applying Lalvani's observation that the portrait is always about public display registering both social disposition and cultural intention we can see that some of the domestic ideals, particularly those emphasizing emotional unity are still upheld whereas others relating to family hierarchy and Victorian middle class values have, if not disappeared, shifted in emphasis.

concerns of the studio photographer have also suggested fractures in the formation of psychic identity and that these might somehow become manifest in the studio in ways that are not simply a psychological affect but an inherent characteristic of the studio apparatus itself.

Chapter Two

A Psychic Space

Having established the portrait studio in terms of its social discursive positioning of the subject we can now progress towards an engagement with the experience of being within this space. We have noted how initial anxieties around visiting early daguerreotype studios soon diminished as technical procedures were refined and familiarity with the procedure became commonplace. What is apparent however is that even today the experience of studio portraiture mobilises a complex series of considerations for the subject, relating to identity as both private and public and the self as image.

Whilst considerations of anxiety around studio portraiture tend to be underplayed or even overlooked in commercial photographic literature they are still present. The commonly imparted advice that photographers should try to put their subjects at ease suggests the presence of an underlying unease that is frequently encountered. Occasionally this becomes more plainly stated; the British Journal of Photography article from 1998 analysed the state of commercial portraiture in relation to an Agfa survey which indicated the presence of such unease(Berger, 1998). In the 2002 publication *The Business of Studio Photography*, (Lilley, 2002) a book aimed at aspiring professionals Edward Lilley devotes several pages to the matter under the heading ‘Self-Image in Portraiture’. What Lilley expresses here, as the title suggests, is that many clients tend to have a rather low self-esteem in relation to their appearance which the professional photographer needs to be sensitive to in order to produce a successful portrait. The commercial nature of this book precludes any in depth theorising, from Lilley, on this point but what is notable is that it is deemed relevant enough to be included and that even in this largely

pragmatic context links are made between individual subjectivity and the studio. Lilley tells us from the vantage of his own many years of professional experience that ‘most people think that they look worse than they actually do’ and that professional photographers ‘become a fearful truth telling agency to the normal person’. He advises ‘You must understand this fear when you start doing portraits. Your first job is to get people’s minds off the camera, then off the lights, and to distract them from the whole mechanical process of taking a portrait.’ (Lilley, 2002: 207). For Lilley this problematic relationship is explored only within its context as an obstacle to the production of a commercially successful portrait but for us it provides a point of departure; a brief acknowledgement of an underlying condition that might allow us to theorise this socially constituted space in terms of the constitution of subjectivity within it.

To understand how this might translate at the level of personal experience we need to look beyond the limited rhetoric of commercial photographic literature. Consider Walter Benjamin’s description of his experience of being photographed in a studio when he was ten years old. ‘Wherever I looked, I saw myself surrounded by screens, cushions, pedestals which lusted for my image like the shades of Hades for the blood of the sacrificial animal. Finally I was presented before a coarsely painted Alpine view and my right hand, which had to hold up a goatee hat, cast its shadow upon the clouds and glacier snow of the backdrop.’ (Benjamin, 1972 vol.4: 261) Benjamin goes on to describe another portrait of himself from ‘one of those studios that, with their stools and tripods, tapestries and easels, partake of both the boudoir and the torture chamber’ in which he describes himself as ‘disfigured by my similarity to everything around me’. Benjamin makes a clear connection between the anxiety he feels and the photographic props that surround him which he perceives as ‘lusting for his image’ and as disfiguring him; in

other words it is the studio equipment itself that engenders his unease (Benjamin, 1972: 262). Benjamin here is not simply fearful that the photographic equipment might reveal some truth about his appearance it is more that he is made acutely aware of the coercive nature of his surroundings in making him as image. In both Benjamin's personal and Lilley's commercial descriptions we see experiential effects being located within the material construction of the photographic studio and within the photographic act. What starts to become established in these accounts and in our earlier descriptions is a sense of the studio space as having particular qualities and characteristics; the presence of equipment, the focus on the subject, the desire for and anxiety around representation. A term that can be used to encompass such apparently divergent constituent factors and provide a useful framework within which to theorise their affects is *apparatus*.

We have already touched upon such a conception of apparatus in chapter one in describing Foucault's term positivity in relation to how history, viewed in terms of discursive formations, might avoid the distorting effects of historical narrative structuring. Agamben argues that even though Foucault doesn't use the word apparatus until quite late in his writing it is nonetheless a decisive term in his overall thought. By tracing the term apparatus back to his earlier *positivite* Agamben allows us to see how the term encompasses key elements of Hegel's thinking particularly in regard to religion which might be viewed as either 'natural' or 'positive'. Natural religion referring to the 'immediate and general relation of human reason to the divine' whilst positive religion 'encompasses the set of beliefs, rules and rites that in a certain society and at a certain historical moment are externally imposed on individuals.'(Agamben, 2009: 4) This positive or historical element becomes internalised by the individual in their own 'systems

of beliefs and feelings'. Agamben's thesis is that Foucault adopts this term, which later becomes apparatus, in order to deal with the problem of how individuals as living beings relate to it. Apparatuses in Foucault's terms can be seen as the points at and through which plays of power become concrete; being both externally imposed upon and simultaneously internalised by the individual living beings positioned within them. They are not simply sets of rules, technologies or even generalities around a particular event but rather 'the network that can be established between these elements' (Agamben, 2009: 7). We can see how this might begin provide a useful model for figuring our studio subject and Agamben's own thoughts on the apparatus go further in this direction.

Agamben radically expands Foucault's concept of apparatus to include anything that has the capacity to 'capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings' (Agamben, 2009: 14). So not just places where power is clearly in evidence such as prisons, schools and factories but also writing, mobile phones, cigarettes, agriculture and even language. Agamben suggests that in fact we can view the world in terms of two 'great classes': living beings and apparatuses, and that in the relation between these two classes emerges a third: subjects. (Agamben, 2009: 14). In other words subjects are only such in that they are constituted in relation to the apparatuses in and through which they engage with the world and by extension the world is only something that can become engaged because of these apparatuses. Further to this, because of the proliferation of apparatuses, the same individual becomes a site for multiple processes of subjectification. An individual is made subject in a very particular way in relation to any one particular apparatus even if this subjectivity may combine and overlap with many others. Agamben sees personal identity as a masquerade that has become pushed to the extreme by this dissemination of

subjectivity but what this also allows is the idea that each separate apparatus is capable of creating subjectivity in a way that is specific (Agamben, 2009: 15).

What kind of apparatus, then, is the studio; what sets it apart? Photography itself would be an obvious answer and although this may seem self-evident it provides a useful distinction. In his *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (Flusser, 1984) Vilem Flusser discusses how photography functions as an apparatus. Flusser does not define an apparatus in quite such expansive terms as Agamben but he does argue that apparatus in general might be analogous to the specific apparatus of the camera. His arguments therefore allow both a way to view the studio as a photographic apparatus and to refine our understanding of apparatus as a concept in terms of the photographic.

Etymologically Flusser notes that the term apparatus has its origins in the Latin *apparare* meaning to prepare or make ready. The camera, he observes, makes itself ready to take pictures; it is predatory and lies in wait. For Flusser a successful photographer is one who manages to subordinate the automatic programming inherent within the apparatus and therefore produce images that have not been seen before. Photographers that do not do this, and Flusser identifies snapshooters here, are in effect blind and simply an extension of the cameras automatic program. Not only are a photographer's intentions in relation to the apparatus desirable but also a deciphering of the resulting photographs is what Flusser espouses as necessary in order to 'create the possibility of freedom in a world dominated by apparatus' (Flusser, 1984: 59). The photographic apparatus is here figured as part of a hierarchy; behind the camera program is the photo industry program, behind this the larger industrial programme, the socio-economic program and so on and for Flusser this entire structure serves to programme society in a self-perpetuating manner,

so that future apparatus programmes become automatically improved but not critically engaged.

Flusser does not deal with commercial photography in his arguments but it is readily apparent where such photography would sit within his schema. In fact if any photographic act seemed to reflect an act dictated at the level of an apparatus viewed as somehow programmed, and in Flusser's schema, redundant, it would be the commercial portrait. Even more than the snapshot which could be argued to have at least the potential for adventurous and experimental play, the commercial portrait photograph, in being culturally determined, can be seen as inscribed in the apparatus programme.

We are beginning to construct a way through Foucault, Agamben and Flusser to think the studio in terms of an apparatus. We can now start to envisage the studio as an apparatus that encompasses not just the photographic equipment and the physical space but also the complex cultural and historical determinations within which these may be situated at any given point. How then might a living being, in Agamben's terminology, be made subject within this studio apparatus? How might we begin to articulate and theorise this process beyond the historical and cultural towards the level of individual subjectivity? How in other words might we begin to explain the anxiety described by Walter Benjamin and Edward Lilley in relation to the apparatus?

These questions recall those central to the application of psychoanalysis in film studies during the 1970's in what became known as apparatus theory. In proposing a 'metapsychology of cinema' film theory began to move away from an analysis of the narrative of the film and focus instead on the spectator and the cinema itself, asking:

'How is the spectator a subject, in the psychoanalytic sense, for cinema? How does cinema work on us and for us as psychical subjects, that is, as subjects of desire?' (Cowie, 1990: 104).

The way that early film theorists such as Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz accomplished an integration of the essentially Foucauldian concept of apparatus with psychoanalytic theory was via Althusser's concept of the imaginary on which the apparatus/subject relationship was seen to hinge.²³ The way that Lacanian psychoanalysis becomes mobilised in these debates provides a useful model for thinking our studio subject who like the cinema spectator is essentially a subject of desire.

For apparatus theory cinema came to be viewed both as a 'signifying practice of ideology' (Creed, 2000: 77) and as analogous to the psychic apparatus (Baudry, 1970/1986: 296). Jean-Louis Baudry²⁴ suggests that the cinematic apparatus positions the 'eye subject' as a 'transcendental subject' by placing him/her at the centre of vision (Baudry, 1970/1986: 292). The aspects of discontinuity and difference necessary to the working of film are linked by Baudry to both the workings of ideology and of the unconscious; in that they rely on a counter system which is simultaneously concealed. Further to this "The arrangement of the different elements – projector, darkened hall, screen – in addition from reproducing in a striking way the mise-en-scene of Plato's cave reconstructs the situation necessary to the release of the "mirror stage" discovered by Lacan.' (Baudry,

²³ Cowie notes that in debates first appearing in the French film journal *Cahiers du Cinema* and the British journal *Screen* in the 1970's 'cinema was identified as imaginary, following Althusser's use of the term to describe man's lived relation to the world. Althusser was here adopting the term by Jacques Lacan: a misconception by the subject of itself as a unified subject who acts on the world'(Cowie 1990: 104)

²⁴ Jean Louis Baudry's seminal essay '*Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus*' published in *Cinéthique* in 1970 is the first example psychoanalytic theory being used to analyse the cinema itself as opposed to the films it screened.

1970/1986: 294, Lacan and Sheridan, 1977: 1).²⁵ For Baudry, this formative moment can be seen to be replayed within the cinematic apparatus which in its very construction plays upon a promise of imagined yet unattainable transcendence. This subjective position is again sited as ideologically constituted: ‘without his always suspecting it, the subject is induced to produce machines which would not only complement or supplement the workings of the secondary process but which could represent his own overall functioning to him: he is led to produce mechanisms mimicking, simulating the apparatus which is no other than himself’.(Baudry, 1975/1986: 317). Thus the invention of cinema was not the result of technical progress and a particular historical moment within a society but more a ‘target of a desire’ (Baudry, 1975/1986: 307). The prisoners in Plato’s cave and the audience in the cinema are linked by the desire to recover a lost satisfaction which is replicated by the apparatus and hinged upon an impression of reality.

Christian Metz whilst agreeing that cinema functions at the level of the imaginary argued that the mirror stage analogy proposed by Baudry cannot replicate a situation where the child ‘sees as an other who turns into I’ (Metz and Britton, 1982: 97) because unlike the mirror the cinema screen will not reflect the subject’s own body back to him. Metz focuses on the subject as all perceiving but also aware that what is perceived in cinema is always absent. “The cinema involves us in the imaginary; it drums up all perception, but

²⁵ The suspension of mobility in conjunction with a predominance of the visual function are here equated with the conditions, identified by Lacan, encountered by the infant at around six to eighteen months that constitute the first formation of the ego. The infant recognises itself in the mirror and therefore begins to see itself as other but this is also a misrecognition for the mirror image appears to the child as more fully formed, more coherent than it actually is; an ‘ideal ego’ (Lacan & Sheridan 1977: 2, Lacan, 1998: 144). The self is therefore formed as split, built upon an unattainable imaginary self that is formed within the field of vision. In being based on such a visual misrecognition the self is not only constituted by something outside (something seen) but also by lack (the difference between the self as experienced and the more complete self as reflected).

to switch it immediately over into its own absence, which is nonetheless the only signifier present' (Metz and Britton, 1982: 45).

What is immediately striking in Baudry's and Metz's arguments is how the apparatus itself becomes theorised in psychoanalytic terms both in its modes of functioning and in its origins. A brief consideration of the photographic studio in these terms (that is in terms of Althusser's imaginary) will provide a useful supplement to Flusser's conception of the photographic apparatus.

For Baudry, cinema, as the target of desire, and as a kind of model of the human psychological function, represents something deeply rooted within the public unconscious rather than simply an historically specific occurrence based upon technological innovation. The photographic studio too can be viewed as similarly predetermined; responding to a collective desire for visual representations of the self that can be traced back to the earliest examples of painting.²⁶ The rapid development of the technology of photography and its initial commercial success, particularly of photographic portraiture, can be viewed as a continuation of cultural practices that offer a response to this desire; a view that can easily become overshadowed through considerations of the unique properties of the medium. It is this desire, the desire of the photographic subject, as with the cinema spectator, that finds the promise of resolution within the apparatus of the studio; not explicitly in its social function within the symbolic

²⁶ Joanna Woodall demonstrates the centrality of naturalistic portraiture to western art by recounting the tales of Narcissus and the Maid of Corinth from Classical mythology and St Veronica and St Luke from the Bible. Pliny the Elder's description in 600BC of how 'The Maid of Corinth drew around the shadow cast on a wall by her lover's profile is generally considered the earliest account of a painted or drawn likeness. (Woodall, 1997: 1)

realm but implicitly within the psychically regressive states that it serves to replay and that its universal popularity might suggest.

The idea of photographic apparatus as being analogous with the psychic apparatus is proposed by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* in attempting to define a location in the psyche '*a theatre where our dreams are enacted*': '...we should picture the instrument which carries out our mental functions as resembling a compound microscope or a photographic apparatus, or something of the kind. On that basis, psychical locality will correspond to a point inside the apparatus at which one of the preliminary stages of an image comes into being. In the microscope and telescope, as we know, these occur in part at ideal points, regions in which no tangible component to the apparatus is situated.'

(Freud, 1999: 349) It is in the space left within the apparatus that this occurs, the point which is part of the machinery and yet has no tangible component; a gap or lacuna. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* Lacan makes the following statement on the constitution of the subject: 'The subject is an apparatus. This apparatus is lacunary, and it is within this lacuna that the subject sets up the function of an object *qua* lost object' (Lacan, 1998: 185) in other words this is the lack which fuels desire. If we extend the photographic analogy to include the studio itself as apparatus then this lacuna is the space of the subject, the very point where the subject is constructed within the apparatus as image....an 'ideal point' yet a point 'in which no tangible component of the apparatus is situated'. The subject in being situated within this missing part temporarily completes the apparatus and forms its purpose...to further the analogy the subject becomes the *objet a* for the apparatus: the cause and focus of desire.

We can begin to see how Lacan's Mirror Stage becomes relevant here but in a different way to that described by Baudry in relation to cinema. 'One has to assume a certain biological gap in him (man), which I try to define when I talk about the mirror stage....The human being has a special relation with his own image – a relation of gap, of alienating tension' (Lacan, 1988: 323). The cinema for Baudry replays the scene of the mirror stage in providing an illusory transcendence and Metz qualifies this with the observation that it also reaffirms the lack that characterises it. The special relation with one's own image cannot be fully addressed within the cinema situation however for as Metz points out the subject is never on the screen. In the studio the mirror stage is again replayed but with the subject as an active participant rather than voyeur. The relation with one's own image is here more directly addressed and with this comes the inevitable replaying of that first encounter in the mirror and the tantalising possibility of a narrowing of the gap. The formation of the ego is based on this specular image, identified as *I* but also as *other* and this misrecognition results in a schismatic conception of self that is constantly in need of covering over. It is in the realm of the imaginary that this covering process occurs and in fact the illusory sense of unity that presents itself to the subject in the Mirror Stage forms the function of the imaginary which at once constitutes identification and alienation in relation to an image. The portrait photograph like the narrative film in cinema is explicitly positioned within the symbolic realm but its basis in the specular and in particular its function in representing the self means that it is also firmly rooted in the imaginary. The socially instigated wish to have ones portrait taken, whilst explicitly realised through predetermined cultural conventions will therefore also disguise a desire²⁷ to maintain the illusion of completeness that is the function of the

²⁷ It is important to note here the distinction between **desire** in the Lacan's use of the word as being fundamentally barred from consciousness and a **wish** which represents something we want consciously; a distinction first made by Freud in relation to dreams.

imaginary. This desire will often be accompanied by a certain anxiety as the subject prepares to relinquish his/her specular image to the mute photographic apparatus. This is the situation described by Barthes in *Camera Lucida* when he states 'No doubt it is metaphorically that I derive my existence from the photographer. But though this dependence is an imaginary one (and from the purest image-repertoire), I experience it with the anguish of an uncertain filiation: an image – my image – will be generated: will I be born from an antipathetic individual or from a "good sort"?' (Barthes, 1993: 11)

The description of the subject as positioned within the photographic apparatus, as situated within a space or gap and thereby somehow completing that apparatus, recalls the descriptions of the spectator within the cinema but again involves a degree of participation and complicity with the image absent in the voyeuristic spectator. We have seen how Walter Benjamin described the anguish he experienced in the studio as emanating directly from the studio props themselves; as inherent within the photographic apparatus. Eduardo Cadava points out that Benjamin 'leaves himself' as he enters the studio and witnesses himself, a double of himself, surrounded by photographic props wherever he looks. 'Experiencing himself as another self, he is no longer himself' (Cadava, 1997: 109). Cadava here draws upon Giselle Freund's statement that within the space of the photographic studio 'the sitter seems to be nothing more than a prop in the studio' (Freund, 1980: 61) and conjectures that if the studio furnishings wish to appropriate Benjamin's image to themselves 'like the shades of Hades for the blood of the sacrificial animal' it is perhaps because they wish too to be represented. 'Existing only in order to be in a photograph, they can only be what they are when a self is sacrificed to its image, when a self enters a photograph and not only becomes, like them, a thing but also enables them to become, like it, more than a thing'. (Cadava, 1997: 109)

Benjamin feels compelled by the apparatus to become something that he is not in order to sacrifice himself to the image. This again recalls Barthes who recounts on knowing that he is about to be photographed: 'I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of "posing", I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image.' (Barthes, 1993: 10) This transforming, figures the particular inscription of the imaginary within the symbolic that occurs exclusively through the photographic act. An innocence of this process is what Benjamin identifies as the 'aura' evident in certain portrait photographs taken at a time soon after the invention of photography. Subjects such as David Octavius Hill's portrait of an Edinburgh fishwife in which Benjamin recognises '...all the possibilities of this portrait art arise because the contact between actuality and photography has not yet occurred' (Benjamin, 1972 vol.2: 372). The unease felt by Barthes and Benjamin occurs when they are confronted with an apparatus that has the potential to make visible the imaginary (mirror) subject as an image of signification. Even at the age of ten Benjamin was aware of this process, could feel the apparatus conspiring to turn him into an object. Benjamin later reiterates this effect in his 1936 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*:

The feeling of strangeness that overcomes the actor before the camera, as Pirandello describes it, is basically of the same kind as the estrangement felt before one's own image in the mirror. But now the image has become separable, transportable. And where is it transported? Before the public. (Benjamin, 1996: 21)

Barthes describes that, in being photographed, he is a subject who feels he is becoming an object and experiences a 'micro version of death', becoming 'Total Image; which is to say

Death in person' (Barthes, 1993: 14). The studio engenders these feelings, the apparatus hinges on a blank space (the gap) within which the subject is situated in order to be made visible as an image, an other, an object of signification; separate from and beyond the control of the subject. This gap can be viewed as a point in which the subject finds he is placed under scrutiny and becomes aware that he is the object of a particular gaze. The studio in these terms can become figured as a space of the gaze not just in terms of an explicit photographic rendering but in terms of how it brings into play the Lacanian gaze; a gaze in which I turn into other.

The concept of the Lacanian gaze was figured by Baudry and Metz in terms of a sense of mastery or identification on the part of the subject. Joan Copjec's critique of early film studies takes issue with such readings and her focus on clarifying the presence of the gaze within the cinema apparatus is particularly relevant in its pertinent reading of Lacan. Copjec points out that in adopting Althusser's rethinking of the imaginary, to incorporate the subject's lived relation to society, Baudry and Metz were able to formulate the screen as a mirror. The subject identifies with the gaze and therefore recognises the images appearing on the screen as its own. Copjec, however, disputes that the subject can be trapped in the imaginary by identifying with the gaze as the signified of these images and therefore 'coming into existence as the realization of a possibility' (Copjec, 1989: 70). In Lacan, she asserts, 'the subject identifies with the gaze as the signifier of the lack that causes the image to languish'. Copjec describes the subject as not identifying with representation but with what lies beyond it, the thing that representation can't show...but which also can never be shown. 'The subject is the effect of the impossibility of seeing what is lacking in the representation, what the subject, therefore, wants to see.'

Desire in other words, the desire of representation, institutes the subject in the visible field.' (Copjec, 1989: 70).

Copjec here paints a far more schismatic conception of the subject positioned within the apparatus; one based entirely on lack and misrecognition rather than on mastery and regressive fantasy. The difference hinges on conflicting interpretations of the Lacanian Gaze; one which figures the Gaze as analogous with an ideal viewing position and the other in which the Gaze appears to come from elsewhere beyond and behind the screen. Lacan's description of the Gaze in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* illustrates this point and seems particularly pertinent to the studio subject who, as we have already noted, appears far from a position of illusory mastery.

Lacan complicates his theory of the Gaze (initially articulated in relation to the mirror stage) by distinguishing between what the subject actually sees and what constitutes the subject within the visible. Lacan illustrates this with two superimposed triangles (Figure 1).

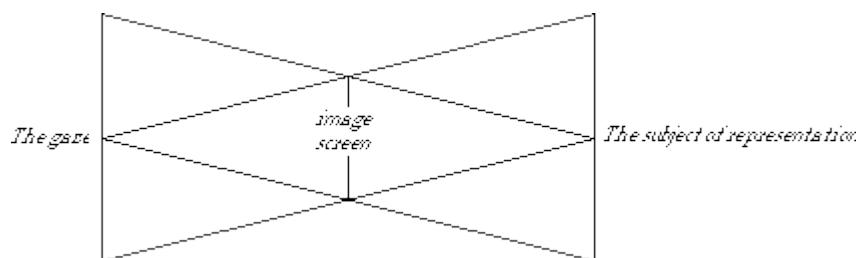


Figure 1: Diagram of Lacan's Gaze

The first triangle with its apex to the right represents the traditional Renaissance version of perspective or cone of vision where the subject assumes a singular geometrical point in space. This triangle represents what the eye of the subject sees. The second triangle with its apex to the left ‘is that which turns me into a picture’. This is the Gaze. The Gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say I am a picture’.(Lacan, 1998: 105)

Lacan describes the Gaze as being the *objet petit a* as it exists in the scopic dimension. The *objet petit a* symbolises the object cause of desire; itself being constituted by a lack. ‘In the scopic relation the object on which depends the phantasy from which the subject is suspended in an essential vacillation is the gaze’ (Lacan, 1998: 83) The Gaze therefore is not something present within visual representation for the subject. As Joan Copjec puts it the Gaze as figured by Lacan’s second triangle ‘diagrams the subject’s mistaken belief that there is something behind the space set out by the first’ (Copjec, 1989: 68). The Gaze being the object cause of desire at the scopic level is then ‘what determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible.....the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which... I am *photo-graphed*.’ (Lacan, 1998: 108)

Lacan makes it clear that the relationship between the eye and the Gaze does not involve a coincidence but rather a lure. ‘*What I look at is never what I wish to see*’ (Lacan, 1998: 103). Something beyond the world of appearances remains hidden is concealed behind the screen of signifiers which forms the veil of representation. What Lacan also makes clear though is that ‘Beyond appearance there is nothing in itself, there is the Gaze’ (Lacan, 1998: 103). This is what constitutes the desiring subject within the visual domain for in fact there is nothing hidden, there is only a lack...the point where something remains hidden, where something is not shown is the point of the Gaze. When the subject

becomes aware of the Gaze he becomes aware that the perceived mastery of vision is in fact illusory ‘as the mirror assumes the function of a screen’ (Copjec, 1989: 69).

Copjec’s critique of early apparatus theory provides us with an application of Lacan that seems far more suited to the subject position within the photographic studio as articulated by Barthes and Benjamin. The earlier formulations of Baudry and Metz might perhaps be translated into the studio in terms of the reliving of the mirror phase. The photograph would equate to the ideal mirror image encountered by the child and perhaps the act of being photographed might in some way represent a replaying of this scenario. The subject at an unconscious level would be torn between the promise of living up to (and confirming) its imaginary mirror image (the image on which the ego is founded) and the risk of a failure to do the same. The descriptions of being made object or even ‘death in person’ (Barthes, 1993: 14) lie outside of this Lacanian imaginary and seems more aligned to an instantiation into the symbolic order and perhaps crucially an awareness of the Gaze. I am not suggesting that when Lacan says of the Gaze ‘I am photo-graphed’ (Lacan, 1998: 106) or ‘I turn myself into a picture under the Gaze’ (Lacan, 1998: 106) that he is intending us to interpret these terms literally or even as simplistic analogies. I am suggesting however that because Lacan chose these particularly photographic analogies, it will not have been without foundation; and that the elements that render these analogies effective as such must reside in some form within them.

Before attempting to locate the Lacanian Gaze within the studio I would like to digress slightly towards the aspect of the Gaze that renders it a screen and in particular how, as Copjec puts it, ‘...the veil of...representation *seems* to hide, to put a screen of aborescent signifiers in front of something hidden beneath.’ (Copjec, 1989: 69) It is striking how this

screening effect is replicated in a metonymic way within the commercial studio. Here we find physical screens, backdrops and infinity curves designed to isolate the subject and as Lucy Lippard suggests ‘create a spatial dislocation into a magical elsewhere’ (Lippard, 1997). The magical elsewhere in the image may be provided by basic props and techniques of lighting and as such be firmly implicated within the set of cultural typologies exploited by the professional photographer but it seems to provide a fitting yet ironic metaphor for all that appears concealed within the visual field of representation. Here we have a form of screen which in its pragmatic commercial function, and as we have seen historical allusions, is quintessentially symbolic yet also forms a kind of synecdoche for the symbolic itself. Particularly in the case of non depictive backdrops the irony comes from the fact that their function is to hide the reality of the symbolic (of which they form a part) by picturing largely nothing, which is exactly what the symbolic itself for Lacan is hiding or serves to mask.

How then might we postulate the Lacanian Gaze in relation to the subject within the studio? Margaret Iverson observes that ‘Only when the position of illusory mastery is vacated does the gaze come into full view’(Iversen, 2007: 123) and that this can occur when a ‘blind spot’ is introduced into the field of vision. An example of such a blind spot is the anamorphous shape in Holbein’s painting *The Ambassadors* (Fig. 2)²⁸ that ‘reflects our own nothingness, in the figure of the death’s head’ (Lacan, 1998: 92). In presenting

²⁸ In the Four Fundamental Concepts, Lacan analyses Holbein’s painting *The Ambassadors* and in particular this ‘strange oblique shape’ which appears suspended in the foreground. This shape can only be apprehended in its form as a human skull when viewed from an acute angle an angle at which the perceived mastery of vision associated with the more conventional representations of the painting cannot be maintained. Lacan contends that by confronting us with such a disorganisation of the visual field effectively subverting conventional geometrical optics Holbein is showing us the ‘imaged embodiment of ...castration, which for us centres the whole organisation of the desires through the framework of the fundamental drives’. ‘We shall then see emerging on the basis of vision...the gaze as such...as it is in this picture’(Lacan 1998: 89)

us with something beyond the safety of the rest of the image, it interrupts our illusion of mastery within the perceptual domain. Todd McGowan cites the example of Hitchcock's film *Rear Window* to illustrate the way the gaze appears for Jeff, not when he becomes aware of himself as potentially being able to be seen by others but in the obscured window in Thorwald's apartment. In presenting a block or blind spot this window represents to Jeff what is unseeable within his surveyed visual arena, in other words it reflects back his own desires (McGowan, 2007)²⁹. Lacan called this blind spot *la tache* (the stain) 'that which always escapes from the grasp of that form of vision that is satisfied with itself as imagining itself as consciousness' (Lacan, 1998: 74) a phrase which as Iverson points out can also act as a definition of the Gaze itself. Miran Bozovic elaborates on why for Jeff in *Rear Window* it is this particular window that 'concerns him'. 'Thorwald's window gazes back at him differently from any other because Jeff sees it in a different way; in it, there is something that intrigues him, something that all other windows lack, something that 'is in the window more than the window itself' and has always been of some concern to him – in short, the object-cause of his desire. *Faced with the window, Jeff can see himself only as the subject of desire*' (Bozovic, 2010: 169 italics in original).

²⁹ For Bozovic the point at which the window itself looks back at him; the blot or *La tache* is the burning cigarette in the darkness within the window.



Figure 2: Hans Holbein the Younger *Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve (The Ambassadors)* 1533

The subject positioned within the photographic studio is not a spectator in the conventional sense; his visual field is not populated by images through choice as in the cinema or in viewing a painting or even in choosing (as in Jeff's case) to observe his neighbours. The studio functions as an apparatus and as a space to produce things to be looked at rather than as a space to be looked at in itself. Nevertheless the subject will still be confronted with a scene; a visual presentation of the apparatus within which the subject is positioned *to be photographed*. We have already seen that this position in itself can instil, as it did for the young Walter Benjamin, a sense that the objects around him might somehow be conspiring in his transformation into image. We are clearly in a domain for which, in a particularly heightened sense, 'we are beings who are looked at, in the spectacle of the world' (Lacan, 1998: 75, Merleau-Ponty, 1969) but we also need here to reiterate that the Gaze itself is not something that we are normally aware of. 'In the so called, waking state, there is an elision of the gaze, and an elision of the fact that not only does it look, *it also shows*' (Lacan, 1998: 75 italics in original). In other words the gaze is always present, and it is always shown, but we don't see it even in situations where we are

knowingly looked at or on display. In fact we are only made aware of the Gaze in situations as I have described where our visual mastery is somehow undercut, decentred by a blind spot within which we become aware of the gap between our own desires and the screen of signifiers that constitutes the symbolic order within the visual field.

Two things need to be qualified here before we proceed. Firstly that the gaze has the potential to surface at any point when our mastery over the visual field is undermined by the appearance of a blind spot. Lacan illustrates this in painting through the anamorphic stain but he also illustrates it biographically by recounting a fishing trip in which a sardine can glinting in the water becomes figured in this way. Lacan also recounts Sartre's description of the gaze in which a subject peeking through a keyhole suddenly becomes aware himself as an object of an external gaze on hearing the rustling of leaves. An awareness of the gaze as a failure of the visual field can be triggered by a variety of phenomena including the non-visual. It is important however, and this is my second point, that these examples are not taken as indicative that an awareness of the gaze can be aligned with specific objects, phenomena or even encounters. In other words not all anamorphic shapes, glinting sardine cans or rustling leaves will have this affect and further to this not even these specific occurrences would necessarily trigger the same effect for the same subject at a different time. This is perhaps best understood in relation to Barthes concept of *Punctum* which Margaret Iverson has identified as equivalent to the Lacanian Gaze. Iverson describes the punctum as 'reversing the lines of sight and disorganising the visual field by *irrupting* into the network of signifiers that constitute reality' (Iversen, 2007: 123 my italics) and goes on to quote Barthes himself: 'This time it is not I who seek it out , it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow and pierces me' (Barthes, 1993: 26) This shooting out, irrupting and piercing

gives us a sense, not always conveyed by Lacan, of the sense of trauma and disorientation associated with an awareness of the gaze. Crucial here is the unexpected and surprising nature of such encounters which would not be the case if we could presuppose their occurrence through certain objects or conditions. This allows us to approach our enquiry into the gaze from a slightly different standpoint one that might avoid the risk of suggesting any inherent and, by inference, consistent causal link between particular objects and their effects. From this standpoint it becomes much clearer that Lacan's description of Holbein's *The Ambassadors* does not necessarily indicate that the effect of its anamorphic element would be consistent for everyone who viewed it but also that, conversely, this does not serve to negate it as an excellent analysis of how the gaze might manifest itself through a particular visual stimulus (an irruption) for certain subjects who were receptive to it. What we hopefully avoid here is a situation where a Lacanian reading of a subject positioned within the studio might be taken to indicate that all subjects in all studios consistently experience particular effects. What it allows is a freedom to interrogate potential effects against a theoretical backdrop around the relationship between image and self (at the level of the unconscious) that the studio undoubtedly mobilises and that certain subjects may or may not be receptive to.

Reining in from this position it is still possible, however, and indeed useful to identify certain events or things as being more likely to initiate an awareness of the gaze than others. In an essay titled *The Politics of The Gaze* (Krips, 2010) Henry Krips makes the point that all such encounters are distinguished by a feeling of anxiety. In recounting Lacan's story of the sardine can Krips notes that the object itself is of little consequence but the glinting of light that momentarily blinds him 'blends with and reinforces a qualitatively similar affect in the young Lacan that comes from a quite different source'

(Krips, 2010: 3) namely his sense of discomfort at the time in feeling out of place in relation to the working class fishermen on the boat. The flashes of light occurring at this particular time take on an excess of significance creating for Lacan ‘a palpable and excessive anxiety, even shame, about who he is and what he is doing’ (Krips, 2010: 3). Krips identifies this with what Freud named “unrealistic anxiety” - an anxiety that is in excess of what its apparent object merits (Freud, 2011: 87, Krips, 2010: 3, Krips, 1999: 142)³⁰. He goes on to surmise that this self-centred anxiety around his identity becomes transformed into a feeling of being ‘externally scrutinised - an anonymous look from elsewhere by an invisible other before whom the young Lacan is reduced to anxiety and shame.’ This switching around from ‘I look’ to ‘I am looked at’ occurs when something acts as an indicator of a lack or failure in the visual field a stain (*tache*) that precipitates an ‘unrealistic anxiety’. This is useful in that it leads us away from objects as such and allows us to conceive of the stain as a blind spot that undermines our reality as experienced in the visual field. In this schema the gaze becomes less associated with a particular thing than with a coexistence of a thing with a feeling of anxiety that seems excessive to the thing itself. This combination constitutes the stain which itself cannot be seen, indeed it is exactly that which cannot be seen within the visual field... ‘the lack that looms up in the visual field and disorganises it’ (Iversen, 2007: 123). The anxiety is therefore associated with this lack, in the sense that this is what constitutes us as desiring subjects through the processes of separation from the mother, misrecognition and symbolic castration, even though it may be initially be triggered by a perceivable object or even a

³⁰ Freud differentiates unrealistic anxiety from realistic anxiety in his 1926 essay ‘Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety’ in relation to childhood phobias. “The anxiety felt in animal phobias is, therefore, an effective reaction on the part of the ego to danger; and the danger which is being signalled in this way is the danger of castration. This danger differs in no respect from the realistic anxiety which the ego normally feels in situations of danger, except that its content remains unconscious and only becomes conscious in the form of a distortion” (Freud, 2011: 87) In this essay Freud rethinks his earlier theory of anxiety which now becomes a symptom of repression rather than a cause of it.

sound. In Lacan's formulation the Gaze is *l'objet petit a* (that is the object cause of desire) as it exists within the visual domain. The actual objects we have been discussing, those that seem to instil this excessive and unrealistic anxiety, will necessarily be in some way related to the subject's desire not as *l'objet petit a* but as something that mobilises it; something that might bring desire into play. For Geoff this would be the burning cigarette in Thorwald's window or for Lacan the intriguing phallic shape that hovers in front in the foreground of Holbein's painting. This makes it possible to suggest that whilst still maintaining that it is unhelpful to conceive of the irruption of the gaze as being inherently imminent in certain objects repeatedly, it might still be useful to propose that certain types of objects, event or phenomena might be more likely to engender this type of effect through a certain common or universal tendency; one that links to the way desire gets set in motion. A dark widow could be said to have this characteristic and indeed this can be argued as the reason it functions so effectively as a narrative device within Hitchcock's Rear Window; its universal quality of mobilising desire allows the audience to associate with Geoff's own desire³¹. Extending this line of thought it can therefore be reasonably stated that certain objects or conditions may be somewhat predisposed to an awareness of the Gaze on account of their propensity for inducing anxiety. A darkened window however almost seems too obvious an example here in the sense that the anxiety it might induce could be reasonably accounted for in terms of fear; that is, the anxiety itself would not necessarily be an example of unrealistic anxiety. If we return to our examples of anxiety within the studio however we find a reaction that is much less easy to explain in terms of fear or the threat of imminent danger. The anxiety

³¹ Both Sartre and Lacan make use of a darkened window in order to illustrate the Gaze. Sartre describes how a window in a farmhouse may function as 'the support for the gaze' he explains that this does not mean an 'actual eye of the watcher hidden behind the curtain, behind a window..... *In themselves they are already eyes*' (Sartre 1969: 257) and Lacan in Seminar I: 'This window, if it gets a bit dark, and if I have reasons for thinking that there is someone behind it, is straight away a gaze' (Lacan 1988: 215).

described by Benjamin and Barthes and identified as a recognised phenomenon within the industry, seems to bare a far closer relation to the kind of outwardly distorted manifestations of the unconscious suggested by Freud as an explanation of unrealistic anxiety (Freud, 2011).

The studio then, is an apparatus that produces visibility. The desire it mobilises is a desire to be made visible in a particular way; that is, photographic. As a space that is centred around this photographic gaze in the playing out of desire, the studio becomes a space in which the the Lacanian Gaze might be implicated in relation to the photographic apparatus. If indeed the anxiety we have identified as present in the studio and linked explicitly with the presence of the photographic equipment is to be identified with an awareness at some level with the Lacanian Gaze then it seems reasonable to suggest that this awareness is mobilised in relation to the photographic. In other words a blind spot can be considered to occur at the level of and even within the photographic apparatus. We have considered the idea that a subject in filling an existing gap within the apparatus might be seen as somehow completing this apparatus. What is never completed however, and is always deferred, is the image itself. The image, the very target of desire is always absent from the scene, is always itself a gap and this gap is located within the apparatus and specifically within the camera. From this perspective we can figure the camera as a blind spot being both centrally placed and yet decentred in the sense that it lacks the very thing that is sought in the visual field; the image which it will produce. Desire becomes mobilised around the camera in its promise of a production of visibility, there is something in the camera more than the camera itself, but this cannot be fully realised for the present subject who is confronted only with the lens, a black hole which like Thorwald's window mobilises desire and like Holbein's anamorphous shape disrupts and

interrupts visual mastery over the scene. The camera's lens becomes a blind spot in the sense that it can only reflect back the subjects own desires.

We are beginning to get a sense here of the studio, not just as a discursively determined apparatus, within which bodies become rendered visible as social beings, but also as a site which is capable of producing particular and often profound subject affects. We can now start to envisage the photographers' studio as a kind of fantasy space; a space that is constructed and organised not simply in the service of a photographic encounter but also as the *mise en scène* of desire. The pragmatic functionality of the photographic equipment and the commercial interests of the photographer are not figured here as being at odds with this psychic dimension but more as providing the conditions for its possibility. In this conception the lived environment of the studio, its distinct and recognisable qualities as inhabited and experienced, might be viewed as formative in constructing the modern subject.

In chapter 1 we gave an historical account of the development of the studio during the 19th century which included various descriptions of these spaces in terms of how they were arranged and put to use. The studio as a space became possible through the realisation of the commercial potential of a new technology, a technology which developed rapidly in response to its commercial success. The unprecedented nature of the photographic image and the subsequent mass production of these images within early studios can be seen as the precursors to the image saturated environment that has become synonymous with late capitalism. The photographer's studio in these terms can be viewed as a space that is inextricably bound to the concept of modernity, particularly in relation to visual culture and the commodification of images. As a space of modernity

the studio can be figured in terms of particular characteristics and qualities; an identifiable architecture that is capable of producing its own psychological dimension.

Relevant here are ideas around the organization of space and spatial systems in relation to the psychological dimensions of modern life. Beatriz Colomina makes links between space and subjectivity and argues that the modern house might be seen to be instrumental in the construction of the modern subject. In describing the domestic interior Colomina relates the architectural demarcation of space and the positioning of furniture within this in terms of how these might produce particular effects on the inhabitant. Space is read in a way that allows an understanding of how a subject within it would experience differing degrees of anxiety and comfort often related to the amount of control implied by the spatial arrangements. Control is often figured here in terms of positions of vantage (and therefore related directly to vision) where the inhabitant's gaze in relation to an intruder, a visitor or an outsider becomes implicated in what are described as 'regimes of control inside the house'.(Colomina, 1992: 76) In describing a modern interior by Adolf Loos, Colomina uses the analogy of a theatre box. 'A sense of security is produced by the position of the couch, the placement of its occupants, against the light. Anyone who, ascending the stairs from the entrance (itself a rather dark passage), enters the living room, would take a few moments to recognize the person sitting in the couch. Conversely any intrusion would soon be detected by a person occupying this area, just as an actor entering the stage is immediately seen by a spectator in a theatre box' (Colomina, 1992: 76). The space is both intimate and yet provides a spacious view without which the space would be small and claustrophobic. Colomina notes that in its psychological dimension 'the theatre box exists at the intersection between claustrophobia and agoraphobia' (Colomina, 1992: 76) and that as an

architectural device employed by Loos ‘Comfort in this space is related to both intimacy and control.’ (Colomina, 1992: 76).

The interior domestic space becomes interrogated in terms of a complex interplay of boundaries (private/public, inside/outside) and the shifting relations of power determined by the possibility of interrelating gazes that the management of these boundaries allows. The Lacanian gaze and the Foucauldian Panoptic gaze are both mobilized in these arguments but here as symptomatic of the physical arrangement of space. ‘Architecture is not simply a platform that accommodates the viewing subject. It is a viewing mechanism that produces the subject. . It precedes and frames its occupant’ (Colomina, 1992: 83).

Of course the studio is not architecture in the same sense that Loos or Le Corbusier’s modernist dwellings are. Studios are not generally designed as such, being more often adaptations of existing spaces. However we can think of studios as having architectural qualities that become manifest in their necessary arrangement and which, as with the domestic interior, can be analysed in terms of particular demarcations of space and their potential effects. In fact as an architecture the studio is quite consistent in its layout whether it is contained within an industrial unit, barn, a schoolroom or a purpose made building. As we have seen early photographic studios were quite specific in their design which needed to maximise the amount of indirect sunlight needed. These glasshouse studios were therefore distinctive architectural features which needed to be purpose built in suitable locations often at rooftop level within larger cities. This necessity was relatively short lived however and the development of artificial lighting systems has meant that it is often more desirable to exclude natural light thereby maximising the

photographer's control. As a consequence photographic studios, once a common feature on the skyline, have largely become hidden from view. The modern studio is instantly recognisable as an interior space but externally it often remains anonymous. In this sense it is masked by the buildings that contain it, not a mask that announces an identity but one that hides it. The more public mask that announces the studio is commonly displaced from the physical space of the studio onto a shop front, signage, magazine adverts and photographers' websites, but even here the studio space itself is seldom represented. It is far more likely that the studio will be represented here using examples of the fantasy images produced within it than by images of the interior space or equipment. A visit to the studio will always be mediated through such masking environments (when booking a sitting for example) where an idealised domesticity is generally favoured over any realistic depiction of the studio encounter.

Colomina notes Loos assertion that 'the house does not have to tell anything to the exterior, instead, all its richness must be manifest in the interior' seems to echo Nietzsche's claim that modern man is modern by virtue of an unprecedented split between his own exterior and interior.(Colomina, 1994: 32) The schizophrenic split between intimate and social being in the modern subject is reflected in domestic architecture which masks through anonymity rather than ostentatious display. The studio space whilst not being an intimate and private space cannot be conceived as entirely public either. Its hidden, anonymous presence seems at odds with the public visibility that it produces and can perhaps be seen as symptomatic of the personal anxiety that we have identified. The masking of the studio in this sense can be seen as a reflection of the modern subject in a very different way to the modern domestic dwelling. The subject here is revealed as having a layering of different masks that serve to hide an interior that

is not simply intimate and personal but may also be the site of troubling anxieties and phobias. Such a reading figures a subject who might wear a mask that publicly and often loudly announces an individual identity but which also serves to hide the more intimate, including darker aspects of shame and anxiety that may indeed remain masked even to the subject himself. We can start to see here how in its very determination ‘The mask becomes responsible for, rather than simply veiling, interior disorders.’ (Colomina, 1994: 23) Anxiety as it is associated with the studio space necessitates its invisibility and it is this very invisibility that in turn becomes complicit with these associations of anxiety.

The studio is a space of modernity where the assumed autonomy and stability of the subject becomes challenged in very specific ways. Darker, intimate, private and largely unconscious forces become mobilised in response to the demands imposed by the studio; demands that illicit an acute awareness of a sense of self in relation to the other and in relation to the self as image. The schizophrenia between ones private and public self that Colomina explores through architectural spaces becomes played out in the architecture of the studio as if it were a stage. The subject finds himself on a stage blinded by the lights, enclosed within an apparatus that both promises to create visual confirmation of his social being but also causes an acute awareness of this social visibility as a mask; a role he is playing. The intense focus on the subject, his illumination, his exposure, causes such internal processes to be placed under intense self-scrutiny and their integrity as somehow schismatic becomes harder to disavow.

The scrutiny that the subject experiences within the studio in combination with the consistent, instantly recognisable, yet veiled architecture in which he becomes framed invites comparison to psychoanalysis; not so much here in terms of theory but as clinical

practice. Mignon Nixon describes the scene of psychoanalysis, its clinical setting, as being part of what psychoanalysts refer to as the frame (Nixon, 2005). The frame is a term that is used to encompass the entire process of analysis its duration and frequency, the location and arrangement of the consulting room, the contractual agreement, the relative position and posture of analyst and analysand. Establishment of the frame is crucial in analysis because it provides a consistent prescribed temporal and spatial environment within which the analysis can proceed. The frame is said to be broken if its boundaries are transgressed and this can occur on the part of both analyst and analysand. An analysand might break the frame by missing a session or arriving late, an analyst by miscalculating fees or altering the arrangement of the room. Any breaking of the frame is seen as evidence of a resistance to the analysis and as a manifestation of transference or countertransference in the case of the analyst. Transference describes an effect that occurs within analysis where the analytic relationship becomes structured by emotions that belong elsewhere usually to the analysand's past experience. Nixon makes the point that transference is brought into focus by the frame and goes on to suggest that there may be a strong transference to the frame itself. (Nixon, 2005: 46) Nixon criticizes academic psychoanalytic theory as tending to ignore transference as a concept and cites this as an example of the apparent rift between psychoanalysis as practice and academic psychoanalysis. Lacan however places great emphasis on transference noting that in analysis it structures all particular relations with the other but also stressing that analysis does not create transference as a phenomenon and that 'there must be, outside the analytic situation, possibilities already present to which it will give their perhaps unique composition.' (Lacan, 1998: 125).

Transference might occur in the course of a photographic studio sitting at various stages. Initially there may be a transference in relation to photographic portraiture itself as the symbol of a particular embodiment of historical and cultural conventions. Nixon cites Jose Bleger as suggesting that there may be a transference of this kind to analysis as an institution. This could be positive in the sense of sharing in ‘the prestige of a great institution’ or negative in terms of associations around the stigma that therapy can engender (Nixon, 2005: 47). In either case there is the possibility of an effect that is brought into the encounter, not originating in the setting itself, as a physical actuality, but on a reaction to the space as a certain embodiment or location of predetermined and institutionalised ideas. The transference can be considered in these terms to occur through and directly from the encounter with actual objects (lights, camera, props, photographer/couch, analyst) as an unconscious response to their implicit ideological dimension.

Transference in its more commonly established sense might also arise in the exchanges between photographer and subject but will remain a by-product of the encounter rather than its aim. The attention that becomes focussed on the subject together with the exercise of control by the photographer will undoubtedly solicit displaced emotions and it is these that the photographer needs to attempt to manipulate or minimize in his pursuit of a commercially successful portrait. The similarity here however should not be overstressed as the transference occurring between an analyst and his patient is something that develops over a long period of time and has the working through of that transference as its aim. Where the two practices do converge is in the aspects of a contracted encounter characterised by ‘an essential dissymmetry in the relation’ (Nixon, 2005: 48) occurring in a predetermined and readily identifiable space. The mobilising of

anxiety and self-reflection within a framed context although largely incidental, rather than targeted, further reinforces the comparison.

The application of the idea of transference in relation to the frame and the acceptance that transference exists outside of analysis is useful in that it gives us a way to further understand how the experience of a space, particularly in the context of an agreed contract or prescribed encounter, might be determined in part by psychological processes originating outside of that space. The studio in these terms becomes a space that not only engenders a particular subject position but also one that can be viewed as being complicated by the subject's engagement with it in terms of past experience. The idea that the studio might in some way owe its particular characteristics as an architecture to the effects of transference provides a way of understanding Walter Benjamin's discomfort as a child within it. It also suggests that we might consider the idea of such spaces as being solely constituted within such a psychological dimension.

Anthony Vidler suggests that modernity has given rise to a new type of space deriving as much from the psychological projections and introjections of an estranged and alienated subject as from the disposition of physical elements (Vidler, 2000). Anxiety as a condition of modern life is related by Vidler to advances in science and psychology in the 19th century and their effects on aesthetics. This anxiety becomes reflected by and incorporated into space, particularly the urban environment, as a new form of psychological space in which the modern subject finds himself. Drawing from Deleuze and Lacan, Vidler identifies anxiety as being a spatial construct; 'space is...not only the locus of anxiety but its internal structure.'(Vidler, 2003: 134). He goes on to link such a 'modernist structure of anxiety' to Lacan's 1936 Mirror Stage lecture in that this renders

conditions of paranoia, neurosis and schizophrenia ‘not as unnatural states but as constitutional to a divided self’ (Vidler, 2003: 134).

Vidler’s take on Lacan provides a way to conceive of the studio not only in terms of the complex way in which a subject might engage with a particular space of modernity and how in turn this space might reflect the underlying conditions for this engagement; but also how this becomes further complicated by the photographic act which, as we have seen, incorporates its own powerful associations with such underlying conditions. ‘A picture for ever separated from the physical being that knows itself only through this image and that for ever will be trying to join itself up, to chase, to identify with its remote identity. A split identity and a vain quest. Forever the self will be seeking this image in the other and not finding it.’ (Vidler, 2003: 134). Vidler’s summarising of Lacan brings to mind Friedrich Kittlers assertion that every photograph or act of capturing on film is ‘nothing but Lacans mirror stage’ (Kittler et al., 1999: 150). Kittler considers that photography and films ‘anatomize the imaginary picture of the body’ and that ‘because the camera operates as a perfect mirror it liquidates the fund of stored self images...’ (Kittler et al., 1999: 150). In this sense Kittler sees the camera as ruthless and destructive in its ‘technological rechristening’ of the soul (Kittler et al., 1999: 150). In the studio the camera acts as this technological and destructive mirror and this allows us to read Vidler’s following insights in a way that becomes usefully nuanced.

Vidler continues: ‘Here the space of anxiety will be both the space between the mirror and the image – the space that will never render up a collapse, a truly unifying closure – and also the space of the mirror reflection, reflecting as it does not only the image of the self but also the image in which the self sits and behind and around that self. Separated

by this space from oneself one is deprived of any autonomy. Hence one's fear of the double, the spectral other, and the anxiety that what one sees in the mirror might not be oneself.'(Vidler, 2003; 134) If we consider this in terms of the photographic encounter we can also start to consider how these two spaces become problematized further by their temporal displacement and absence from the immediate scene; how this absence of the image does not render its affects impotent but rather can be considered to heighten them by placing them in the realm of fantasy.

Vidler goes on to posit that anxiety is linked to the uncanny experience of both seeing oneself as not oneself and of being viewed by the object of one's own view. In either case anxiety is framed through the mirror or its substitute (here Vidler cites Lacan's interpretation of Freud's 'Wolf-Man' whose dreamt anxiety of wolves sitting on the branches of a tree becomes framed by the sudden opening of his window) (Vidler, 2003: 134). Anxiety then is not itself the frame but its revelations, which often take on the aspect of *unheimlich*, familiar yet strange and distant.³² (Freud, 2003b: 148) Vidler points out that anxiety occurs when the frame reveals what was already there, the wolves for instance, and relates this to the presence of a sense of expectation and of waiting. Vidler's reasoning here further strengthens Kittler's mirror/camera analogy and in fact the deferred nature of the photographic self image is noted by Kittler, in relating the

³² Freud goes to great length to pin down the meaning of the word *unheimlich* in relation to *heimlich*; listing a great variety of possible definitions, before concluding: 'What interests us most in this long extract is to find that among its different shades of meaning the word *heimlich* exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, *unheimlich*. What is *heimlich* thus comes to be *unheimlich*. [...] In general we are reminded that the word *heimlich* is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight. *Unheimlich* is customarily used, we are told, as the contrary only of the first signification of *heimlich*, and not of the second. [...] On the other hand, we notice that Schelling says something which throws quite a new light on the concept of the *Unheimlich*, for which we were certainly not prepared. According to him, everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light.' (Freud, 2003: 148)

experiences of film actors, as contributing to a particularly traumatic sense of ‘nothing’ or ‘the fleeting evanescence of human life’ on seeing themselves on screen (Kittler et al., 1999: 150).

What, then, happens when our studio subject encounters his or her own image? The idea of a contracted process or engagement that results in a new self image recalls our previous discussion on transference as something that might be mobilised within the sitting in relation to the space, the photographer or even studio photography as the signifier of particular values. To make further sense of this transference and the complex play of anxiety and desire that the studio engenders it will be useful to further our analogy to psychoanalysis as a practice. With practical analysis we are in a domain that seeks to draw out through the process of transference and counter transference an understanding of the analysand’s mental functioning as its unconscious aspects become played out within a controlled frame. The studio photographer certainly does not seek to do the same with his subject, yet as we have described this subject often experiences similarly intense emotional affects. Slavoj Zizek describes the process and purpose of analysis in terms of how its outcome or conclusion might be experienced by the analysand. Zizek’s emphasis on the nature of what becomes revealed in analysis provides a useful way to think of the studio particularly here in terms of the image that it produces; an image that, as deferred, mobilises desire and anxiety but as an object that becomes revealed might further illuminate the emotive effects precipitated by the studio apparatus.

Zizek notes that in analysis ‘the analytic cure reaches its conclusion when the analysand is able to formulate the result of his analysis in a mathem that no longer ‘speaks about

himself' but is in a radical sense impersonal. Therein resides the nature of passe: to confer upon the most intimate kernel of our being the form of an anonymous 'meaningless' formula in which no unique subjectivity resounds.'(Žižek, 2005: 171) This stripping away of belief in an autonomous ego, the stripping away of narcissism and the acknowledgement of the analysand that he is a castrated subject is often only possible within the context of the psychoanalytic procedure but it is not because of this procedure that such conditions exist. The analysis simply reveals something that is already there. The analysand may start out wishing to uncover some essential truth in the autonomy of his thinking, a way of coping with or negotiating a contingent external reality, but he will end up with the realisation that he actually doesn't exist in these terms at all and can 'freely assume his own non existence' (Žižek, 2005: 170). What is uncovered then by the analysand is in effect waiting to be uncovered but is, in the course of day to day existence, too traumatic to surface. This is why analysis tends to be initiated when the illusion of day to day existence somehow starts to break down, when the ego fails to successfully maintain its self affirming position. My ability to freely assume my own non existence to identify with this 'piece of shit' (Žižek, 2005: 168) that I misrecognised as my innermost dignity, my agalma, is dependent on the process of analysis. Without this environment, provided by the analyst, without the frame, such thoughts would be unthinkable; the nature of the ego's misrecognition ensures that we are totally invested in our subjectivist belief. The necessity for, and the success of, psychoanalysis however indicates that the ego cannot always successfully maintain its position that we misrecognise as our true selves, what it covers up is always there even if we can't recognise it. What the ego covers therefore always has the potential to break through, to surface, which outside of the analytic frame can result in a destabilising anxiety. We have made links between this anxiety and the anxiety that surfaces in the studio but I think we

can similarly make a link between the de-centred, non-existent subject that emerges from psychoanalysis and the pictured subject of the studio photograph. The link is not as might be expected between some form of revelation of an interior self through photography or even an allusion to a form of disquiet or turmoil. It is more that, especially in relation to commercial portraiture, we become depicted within a set of conventionalised visual tropes that whilst promising to reveal an individual and unique personality actually tend to a homogenizing uniformity. In such pictures the subject becomes subsumed as a type, positioned within an ideologically constituted conception of self in relation to class, family, gender, education, age as mediated through the studios commercially determined typologies of pose, setting and display. In other words the studio renders us visible in a way that privileges social signification over subjective autonomy and we become clearly positioned and demarcated within the ideology which determines our existence. In such studio portraits we are always positioned as Other.

This is not to suggest that we consciously engage with such ideas whenever we encounter our portrait but in a sense we are confronted with a visualising of the self that if fully interrogated by the subject would open up the same issues that psychoanalysis aims towards. In the encounter with our own image we are neither prepared nor receptive as we might be during analysis; the ego needs to quickly reconcile the difference between what is made visible and what is perpetuated as misrecognition, but not before a sense of disquiet or anxiety can surface. This anxiety equates with the non-existence of the subject, a subject that only exists in as much as he is castrated through misrecognition of his own specular image. In his seminar on anxiety Lacan describes the process of analysis as a ‘re-examination of that which aggression intrinsically seeks out, namely the relation to the specular image. It is the extent to which the subject exhausts his passions on this image that determines the emergence of this series of demands, leading to an ever more

original demand, in historical terms, and that regression as such is modulated'.... 'In fact, it is to the extent to which all the forms of the demand are exhausted to their term, to the end of the line, until the zero demand, that we see the relation of castration emerge' (Diatkine, 2006: 1056, Lacan, 2004: 65). This is the non-existence Zizek describes and it is this stripping away and this original relation to the image of the self that the photographic portrait threatens to uncover not as in analysis through a gradual process but as a disturbing 'upsurge of otherness'(Baudrillard, 1999a: 148). Baudrillard describes this otherness as belonging to the mute and silent apparatus and whilst being superficially masked by the conventions of genre and style it can never be fully subsumed by them. 'An anxiety-ridden situation which we try to ward off at all costs with forced signification' (Baudrillard, 1999a: 148)³³. The pragmatic, and conventional commercial portrait doesn't only show what we believe that we desire it also threatens to reveal the 'anonymous meaningless formula in which no unique subjectivity resounds.'(Zížek, 2005: 171).

³³ Baudrillard uses the studio portraits of Mike Disfarmer in order to demonstrate the emergence of this effect of otherness that he attributes to a certain naive artlessness on the part of Disfarmer and a similarly naïve innocence on the part of his sitters (Baudrillard, 1999: 149). I would suggest that this eruption of otherness although perhaps particularly apparent in Disfarmer's work will be present in any studio portrait even if it becomes masked to a greater degree by the commercially and socially determined artistry of the photographer and a heightened social awareness of photography on the part of the sitter

Chapter Three

The Studio Photographed

Introduction

We have established that the photographic studio can be considered as an apparatus and that this apparatus cannot be defined solely in terms of its material constituents but encompasses both social and psychological dimensions. The elements of the studio; the lights, the backdrop, the camera, the photographer not only fulfil a functional purpose but characterize a particular ideological space that provides the conditions for the production of the subject. Furthermore we have conjectured that the studio as experienced by the subject might be usefully theorised in Lacanian terms as a *mise en scène* of desire in its unconscious recalling of the mirror stage and in providing the conditions for a heightened awareness of the Gaze.

In this chapter we will consider ways in which the studio has attracted the attention of artists as a space to explore these social and psychological dimensions. Of particular interest will be certain more self-reflexive postmodern practices that consciously picture the studio setting and equipment; proposing their role in the construction of meaning. The aim here is to pay particular attention to the way that the studio setting becomes engaged by these practices and to suggest that whilst integral in terms of meaning remains relatively under theorised in itself. Through such analysis of pertinent examples of critical practice we can both expand upon and reinforce the theoretical propositions made in the previous chapter and demonstrate how these might be proposed or utilised

through photographic art practice. Having thus established a way to discuss such theoretical considerations as embodied in practice we can, towards the end of this chapter, move to the less reflexive and less critical imagery of commercial practice in order to discover if this might provide further insights.³⁴

There is one image however that is particularly pertinent to our enquiry whilst remaining resistant to such straightforward categorisation. Helmut Newton's *Self Portrait with Wife June and Models* (1981) pictures the studio as the site of a complex intersection of gazes. It has also been theorised by Victor Burgin in his essay *Perverse Space* which seeks to reassert Laura Mulvey's ideas on the male gaze for psychoanalytic theory based on 'unconscious investments in looking' (Burgin, 1996: 58) rather than simple notions of male objectification. The fact that Mulvey's gendered reading of apparatus theory here becomes interrogated within the photographic studio makes this an ideal image with which to begin our chapter.

³⁴ In his analysis of Jeff Wall's *Picture for Women* David Campany describes how the rise of feminism and psychoanalytic theory in the 1970's complicated the idea of 'the spectator' that underpinned the then prevalent Structuralist debates on art. 'Thinking about looking at images might foreground the physical apparatus involved – camera, screen, print, frame, editing, the physiological eye and of perception and so on – but feminism insisted upon the psychical apparatus too – desire, difference, identification, interpellation, ideology, the unconscious.' (Campany, 2011: 55)

Helmut Newton

Self Portrait with Wife June and Models (1981)



Figure 1: Helmut Newton *Self Portrait with Wife June and Models* 1981

Self Portrait with Wife June and Models (1981) is a photograph taken in the Vogue studios in Paris by Helmut Newton, a fashion photographer renowned for his sexually suggestive and fetishized representations of women (Bull, 2009: 153). It depicts a seemingly typical studio fashion/glamour shoot in progress; the presence of a female model wearing only high heeled shoes and adopting a conventionalised ‘pin-up’ pose (Burgin, 1996: 60) against a white studio backdrop signal the kind of image that Helmut Newton is renowned for. What makes this image remarkable is that Newton has taken it from behind the model and is therefore situated on the white backdrop paper that would conventionally isolate the model from the reality of the studio. Newton has focused his

camera beyond the model and out into the studio so that we see the model's back cropped by the image frame and slightly out of focus in the foreground and the studio setting beyond. Because the studio includes a full length mirror (presumably to allow the models to check their pose) we also see, reflected in this mirror, the front of the model, as well as Newton himself, positioned behind her, hunched over the waist level viewfinder of his camera. Also visible in this mirror are the legs of another female model (again wearing high heeled shoes) who is seated in the studio just in front of, but not on, the backdrop paper that extends across the floor. The image is further complicated by the inclusion, on the right, of Helmut Newton's wife, June, who sits next to the mirror observing her husband at work, she is leant forward with her chin rested in her hand. Behind June there is an open door leading outside; through this we see cars, a street lamp and part of a large building beyond.

This is clearly not a straightforward image and it seems to deny easy classification.³⁵ It does not fit, for instance, into the fashion genre which its authorship, setting and pictured nudity might suggest.³⁶ Newton's image cannot be read in this way because his

³⁵ Although taken during a commercial fashion shoot this is an example of what Newton called his autobiographical portraits. In a 1986 interview with Frank Horvat Newton explains how he decided to make a series of self-portraits within the *mise en scène* of the fashion shoot. '...I put myself into the pictures. It's lovely, like playing a little part in a play. Many photographers like doing self-portraits. I think it's even more interesting when one is part of a whole *mise-en-scène*.' Of the *Self Portrait with June and Models* Newton says: 'I did it in the Paris Vogue studio, because it was a place I knew well and around which much of my life had evolved. It's a very personal picture, that's why it's one of my favourites. There is first of all me, with my camera, but there is also June, who has got a wonderfully funny expression while she looks at my naked model, there is the Vogue Studio, with the clothes rack, the door to the street is open, you see the cars parked on Place du Palais Bourbon, a place that I have known for twenty two years, where I had taken thousands of pictures, especially during Haute Couture Collections. The photograph has all the little signals of my life: my models, my camera, my wife, the studio, the Place du Palais Bourbon. That's what I call an autobiographical picture. It's a very good exercise, to me all these are exercises.' (Horvat, 1986) Newton released the image in a planned edition of 75 10" x 10.5" prints of which only 25 were produced. The image was first published in Marquet, *Helmut Newton: Mode et Portraits*, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1984.

³⁶ It is not uncommon within fashion, glamour and celebrity photography for the studio setting and equipment to become incorporated as compositional elements in a shoot but this usually occurs as a playful thematic device rather than a critical strategy. Examples of this can be found in the work of

own presence and, perhaps particularly, that of his wife suggest a complicated domestic and personal dynamic that place it beyond the realm of easily decoded and contrived signification required by the fashion industry. Neither is it easy to read as a documentary photograph, of the sort that might aim to present a behind the scenes view or critique of Newton's profession; its complicated presentation of space compressed into overlapping plains within the image make it appear too fragmented and idiosyncratic to be easily accepted in these terms.³⁷

The inclusion of Newton's own reflection and of course the camera itself means that we are made aware of the photographer and the photographic apparatus to an unusual degree. What also becomes proposed by this reflection is a heightened awareness of our own viewpoint as being aligned with Newton's and therefore mediated by it. An already complex intersection of gazes within the image here extends out to implicate our own gaze in a way that conventional fashion, documentary or even self-portraiture does not.³⁸ Burgin's analysis of this image uses the viewer's awareness of their own gaze to conjecture that like Newton we are 'caught looking'. Stephen Bull notes that 'Burgin's interpretation of the photograph begins to break down the idea of the active/male, passive/female divide, suggesting that more complicated forms of spectatorship are possible' (Bull, 2009: 55). Crucially for our purposes Burgin does more though than provide a reinvigoration of the arguments presented by Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay

Newton himself as well as Richard Avedon, Irving Penn, Brian Duffy and Annie Leibovitz along with many others.

³⁷ This recalls the more self-conscious and medium driven urban landscape photographs of Lee Friedlander where pictured reflections, backs of heads and distant road signs become deliberately compressed, fragmented and democratised within the photographic frame. The point here is that any political or social meaning related to the subject matter that Friedlander photographs can only be read as secondary or at least within the context of his own modernist photographic practice. (Clarke, 1997: 38)

³⁸ Burgin even suggests that Newton may have been making an unconscious reference to Valazquez's painting *Las Meninas* (1656) here. (Burgin 1996: 285)

'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' he also relocates these arguments within the photographic studio.³⁹ What we notice in Burgin's text however is that despite a lengthy description and semiotic interrogation of the images component parts the studio setting itself figures very little in his analysis. Mulvey describes the conditions encountered within the cinema auditorium as producing certain effects for the subject or spectator positioned within it⁴⁰ (Mulvey, 1986: 201) but Burgin avoids defining the studio as a particular apparatus in similar terms. The emphasis is placed very much on the players in this scene; the models, Newton himself and his wife; the signification of their relative postures and states of dress and how these might suggest voyeuristic or fetishistic modes of looking; rather than on the setting itself. It is important therefore that we look afresh at this image and try to determine those features that distinguish its pictured setting as a studio. The point here is not to denigrate Burgin's psychoanalytical interpretation it is more to propose the photographic studio provides an essential yet relatively unremarked apparatus within which the events that Burgin theorises become enabled.

What becomes apparent when looking at Newton's photograph is just how few indicators of what we might expect to find in a studio, it contains. In fact if we were to discount the full length mirror, and what it reflects, there would be none. There are no

³⁹ As John Mitchell observes 'Burgin along with art historian Griselda Pollock and artist/photographer Mary Kelly were instrumental in 'feminist-is-ing' Lacan for the photography community'. Feminist film theory drew from the Lacanian concepts set out by Baudry and Metz during the 1970's building on these as a means to theorise and critique the sexualised nature of looking and how this had become manifest in the cinema as a reflection of a patriarchal order. Laura Mulvey's essay which famously argues this position is championed by Burgin in *Perverse Space*. Burgin contends that Mulvey's arguments had become 'reduced and fetishised' through its appropriation in photography theory often being expressed in terms of simplistic gender differences that figure an unproblematic objectifying male gaze. Burgin attempts to redress this through his mapping out of the complex *Perverse Space* pictured by Newton's image.

⁴⁰ Mulvey describes... 'the extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation.' and continues 'Among other things, the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire onto the performer' (Mulvey 1986: 201)

lights, props or other recognisable paraphernalia on show save perhaps for the cable that runs under June's chair. We might deduce that this is a public or institutional space due to the Sortie sign above the door and the relatively unadorned appearance of the walls and floor that are visible. Even though we can't see what is behind the mirror there is nothing to indicate that it would not simply be more of the same.....another door perhaps and maybe a large curtain. Without this mirror the scene would certainly appear intriguing; inviting speculation perhaps on the possible relationship between the middle aged woman and a younger woman in a state of undress, but I would suggest that a studio setting would present only one of many possibilities. What is demonstrated through this hypothetical exercise is that very little is required in order for us to recognise or understand a particular space as being a studio. A space is not in itself a studio but becomes one through the introduction of certain elements, which alter our conception of it...in short the discursive elements that combine to form an apparatus.⁴¹ The mirror here reflects a number of elements which combine to alter our understanding of the pictured space; a posed model, a photographer, a camera and a backdrop. The combination of nudity, generic pin-up pose and high heeled shoes that characterise the model are comprehensively analysed by Burgin (Burgin, 1996: 60) and reiterated by Bull as being 'in mimicry of millions of other poses held before it' (Bull, 2009: 55). Similarly Newton is described in terms of presenting a clichéd representation of himself as a fashion photographer who hunched over his camera in a mac is 'simultaneously revealed as an exhibitionist and a voyeur' (Bull, 2009: 55, Burgin, 1996) However I would point out here that these two elements do not in themselves necessarily denote studio; for fashion and glamour models can equally appear in such poses and states of undress on

⁴¹ The studio as a discursive formation proposed in chapter 1 in relation to Foucault and further discussed in terms of Agamben's 'What is an Apparatus?' in chapter 2 seem to become visualised here.

location and the photographer too might appear just as hunched over a similar camera outside of the studio. The one thing that functions in this image as definitively ‘of the studio’ is the backdrop and it is only the presence of the other elements in relation to this that anchors them too in these terms. Because this white backdrop can only be seen in the mirror but also forms the majority of its reflected image it makes the mirror image stand out as very distinct from the rest of the pictured scene appearing as a picture within a picture. Burgin makes the point that the rectangular shape of this mirror approximates the 3:2 picture ratio of a 35mm camera and that this combined with the reflected contents alludes to a conventional fashion image.(Burgin, 1996: 74) To further this hypothetical journey we might then consider what would happen if we removed the model and the photographer from this reflected scene; leaving just the white paper backdrop. This would, I believe, still be denotative of a studio space but only because of one thing; the visible edge where the backdrop ends revealing the wooden floor beneath it. If, in this mirror reflection, we could see only the white of the screen with, similar to its sides, no indication of a bottom edge, the mirror itself would appear to us as simply a plain white rectangular surface.⁴²

⁴² The mirror in Newton’s image recalls Craig Owens essay ‘Photography en abyme’ (Owens, 1978) in which he discusses how mirrors appearing within a photograph ‘as a reduced internal image of the photograph’ reduplicate and mirrors the photographic process itself within the image. This he relates to the term ‘en abyme’ used in literary criticism to describe a section of text that reproduces or suggests the larger structure of the text as a whole in which it is contained. ‘It tells us in a photograph what a photograph is *en abyme*’ (Owens, 1978: 75) In Newton’s photograph, as Burgin notes, it is the mirror’s reflection rather than the image as a whole that acts as a signifier of the fetishizing space of the fashion image. In this sense the mirror image in Newton’s photograph does more than signal the photographic or create a reduplication *en abyme* it also presents an idealised image. It is only in the mirror that the model appears complete, coherent and in place (pictured within the fetishizing space of the studio fashion image) outside of the reflection the model is fragmented, blurred and truncated by the photographic frame. Read in these terms Newton’s photograph suggests a direct correlation between the illusory coherence identified by the infant at Lacan’s Mirror Stage and the studio as an apparatus structured around the desire to produce images that picture a unified and transcendent coherence.

Burgin describes the space created by the white backdrop paper in Newton's photograph as 'the space of the image' and the 'domain of the visible'... 'the desert island of backdrop paper that is usually the model's sovereign possession in the space of the studio' (Burgin, 1996: 62). This is the diegetic space of the studio photograph; the white here representing an ultimate reduction of what Lalvani defines as 'fabricated' and 'theatrical' ... 'a space for constructing metonymic signs that evoke the necessary impressions and experiences'. (Lalvani, 1996: 68) Newton, by invading this diegetic space, and picturing himself within it, undermines its constructed nature and the fetishization that in this case constitute the 'necessary' impressions for his fashion based oeuvre. The white space is pictured here not just as the setting for such constructions but also as being itself a fabrication; part of the apparatus that produces them. This as we have seen is most strongly conveyed in Newton's image where the boundaries between the diegetic space and the non-diegetic space, that it serves to screen, become visible. In a sense the studio comes into visibility neither inside its constructed fantasy space nor in the architectural space of the room that surrounds it but at the point where these two can be seen to meet.⁴³

Burgin concludes that in the type of fashion image Newton appears to be making; 'only the model isolated against the seamless background paper, cut off from any context by the frame of the image' (Burgin, 1996: 74), is normal in the sense that it is conventionally fetishistic. 'As an expression of the overvaluation of the phallic metaphor in patriarchy, the fetishistic component of Newton's photograph is perfectly normal – but only when

⁴³ This brings to mind Roland Barthes's observation on reading *The Marquis de Sade* where he identifies two different and antipathetic codes of language; one conventional and conformist, the other pornographic and anarchic. It is where these two meet; in the seam or edge between them that the pleasure of the text resides. (Barthes. 1975: 6) There is thus something revealed at the point where two systems meet that would not otherwise be apparent in either one.

we fetishize it, only when we isolate it from the space within which it is situated' (Burgin, 1996: 73). Once we begin to see this wider space beyond the white backdrop things become less straightforward confounding any reading that might seek to propose a simplified form of objectification based on gender politics. This is the perverse space that Burgin identifies, a space where 'nothing is fixed, everything is mobile, there is no particular aim' where 'The looks given by the protagonists neither meet nor converge and they add up to nothing in particular' (Burgin, 1996: 75). The studio is thus cast here as the site of production for conventionalised and fetishistic imagery but at the same time a space that cannot be easily defined only in terms of a putative gendered gaze.

Jemima Stehli

This complex and perverse space that Burgin identifies in Newton's image becomes itself interrogated in Jemima Stehli's photograph '*Self Portrait with Karen*' (2000). Stehli parodies Newton's '*Self Portrait with Wife June and Models*' by recreating it with herself playing the part of Newton.⁴⁴ Stehli is often described as a feminist artist because her work frequently addresses themes of female objectification and gender politics (Burrows in Stehli and Burrows, 2003: 6, Schwabsky, 2001). However, Stehli's take on such matters is often far from straightforward and she has been criticised for picturing her own naked body in ways that deny any easy reading as critique and often appear to openly rejoice in a kind of narcissistic exhibitionism (Schwabsky, 2001) (Stehli and Burrows, 2003: 6).

⁴⁴ Simon Baker makes the point that 'through Burgin's text Newton...has been placed in a peculiar relation to contemporary practice, having been evoked in a disinterested, even utilitarian way, for the purposes of a theoretical account of the problem of looking.' (Stehli and Hilliard 2009: 10) Newton's image has been 'dragged in' to the discourse of conceptual art and contemporary photographic practice because it dramatizes the politics of the gaze from a uniquely first hand perspective. It is almost certainly this unusual position, hinged between knowing criticality and unwitting disclosure, that attracted the attentions of Jemima Stehli.

Alison Jones makes the point that ‘Anyone acquainted with feminist art history encountering Jemima Stehli’s nude self-portraits will have Lucy Lippard’s legendary excoriation ringing in their ears: It is a subtle abyss that separates men’s use of women for sexual titillation and women’s use of women to expose that insult’ (Jones, 2000: 29). David Burrows notes that ‘Despite much critical support, some have voiced a suspicion that she is repeating the subservient and objectified roles assigned to women in Western Culture’ but goes on to suggest ‘That Jemima Stehli’s practice produces a feeling of mistrust – a questioning of the artists motives – is I feel an important aspect of her work’ (Stehli and Burrows, 2003: 6). Indeed it is this ambivalence in Stehli’s work that proposes a consideration beyond gender politics towards the act of looking itself. In these terms her work has been described as creating ‘an innovative critical analysis of the gaze through the structure of the photographic image’ and as frequently ‘addressing the Lacanian affirmation ‘I see myself looking at myself’ (Stella Santacatterina inStehli and Burrows, 2003: 25). What becomes of particular interest here is that this ‘analysis of the gaze’ becomes enacted through Stehli’s practice within the studio. The deliberate picturing of the studio setting required in order to recreate Newton’s image becomes a reflexive strategy for other works that Stehli produced around this time. Of particular interest is *Self Portrait with Grace* (2000) a variation of the *Self Portrait with Karen* (2000) in which the studio setting becomes more prominent and the works *Triptych Headless Orange* (2000), *Red Turning* (2000) and *Grey-Green Painting* (2000) which lose any direct reference to Newton but develop the theme of object/subject mirroring within the studio. As with the Newton photograph we are going to pay close attention to how the studio becomes visible in Stehli’s images before considering its role in their construction of meaning.

Self Portrait with Karen (2000)



Figure 2: Jemima Stehli *Self Portrait with Karen* 2000

The Perverse Space that Burgin articulates through Newton's *Self Portrait with Wife June and Models* (1981) casts the studio as the site for a complex staging of desire and it is this space that Stehli inhabits in *Self Portrait with Karen* (2000). Here Stehli has recreated Newton's image in her own studio complete with nude model, mirror and view to outside. Stehli, as photographer, stands in the place of Newton on the white backdrop paper behind the model and mimics his hunched pose. Stehli here complicates the traditionally gendered passive female/active male relationship made visible by Newton. Missing from the scene is a figure that represents Newton's wife June from the original. Stephen Bull suggests that 'Stehli as the reflected photographer, photographing a female

model....condenses the look of both Newton and June' (Bull, 2009: 56). The elements that remain most true to Newton's original; providing, in a sense, the structural context in which Stehli can stage her strategic substitutions or omissions are the same elements that we identified as denotative of a studio setting: The pose of the model, the photographer and the backdrop; again only fully visible in the full length mirror. The room that is pictured as the studio space here is clearly different to that shown in Newton's image but remains consistent in that it lacks any indicators that could decisively be described as being of the studio. The most significant difference is the presence of four, approximately A4 sized, photographs taped to the wall that appears to the left of the image; these picture Stehli performing naked in front of a studio backdrop and appear to be from Stehli's contemporaneous series *Red Turning* (2000). Where June would be seated in Newton's image there is a collection of objects on the floor including what appears to be a shoe box filled with various smaller objects none of which are clear enough to conclusively identify. The room itself is similarly bland and unadorned but appears less institutional having more the feel of a large urban garage space or industrial unit than a room in a large city building. Stehli ensures there is enough similarity between the settings to reproduce an impression of Newton's location but the accuracy of her restaging is concentrated on the positions and stances of herself and the model and the position of the mirror and reflected white backdrop. The sufficiently detailed reconstruction of Newton's image has provided Stehli with what Simon Baker describes as a 'pre-organised, pre-determined pictorial situation' (Baker in Baker, 2009: 10) within which she 'attempts a genuine re-working of subject positions and authorial agency by implicating herself as an artist within the structural, aesthetic regime or even process of another.' (Baker, 2009: 9). Stehli's close adherence to this appropriated space can be seen as further problematizing Newton's already complex image. She exploits the already

unstable perverse space in order to subvert the one ‘normal’ element: Newton’s fetishizing male gaze; substituting her own female gaze. Alongside this seemingly feminist intervention Stehli embraces the conflation of subject and object that is apparent in Newton’s image and it is this aspect that becomes emphasised and developed in a number of other works produced by Stehli at this time.

Self Portrait with Grace (2000)

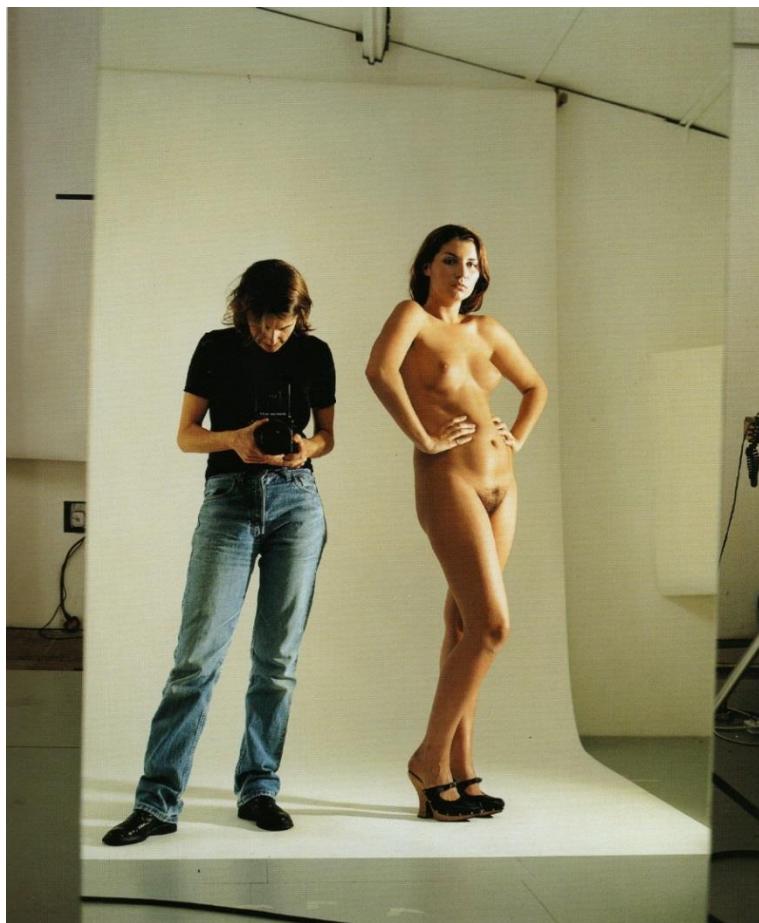


Figure 3: Jemima Stehli *Self Portrait with Grace* 2000

Self Portrait with Grace is based on the same Newton image but is a much looser interpretation utilising a different and somewhat more central composition. The

significance for us is that despite appearing formally simplified as an image, the studio apparatus has become more directly conveyed. The image I have chosen to analyse here is in colour which immediately sets it apart from both the Self Portrait with Karen we have been discussing and Newton's original image both of which were shot in black and white.⁴⁵ The colour image seems to emphasise the warm skin tones of the model and the distinctive denim blue of Stehli's jeans. These things stand out against the studio setting and the backdrop which remain essentially monochrome in character despite possessing (in my reproduction at least) an overall green cast. The model, naked but for the ubiquitous heeled shoes, appears all the more statuesque and monumental here next to Stehli partly aided by the more directly central composition and partly due to a radiance and sense of presence that the coloured skin tones, nakedness, pin up pose and direct address to the viewer combine to promote. This image again utilises the same full length mirror but this time its surface, on which we see Stehli and Grace reflected, occupies virtually the entire photographic frame. The top and the bottom of the mirror extend past the top and bottom of the image frame rendering the studio setting beyond as only visible in the two narrow strips that are formed between the visible edges of the mirror and the side edges of the photograph. Whilst the initial effect is perhaps more akin to looking at a conventional studio image, with the figures occupying a large portion of the image surface and set against a plain backdrop, there are a number of details that are visible beyond, as well as in, the mirror that reveal the studio apparatus.

To the right we see a small detail of what appears to be the leg of a metal tripod or possibly a light stand. Above this, and possibly attached to whatever equipment it

⁴⁵ Newton's Self Portrait with Wife June and Models exists only in black and white. Stehli's self-portraits with Karen and Grace exist both in colour and black and white versions. The black and white version of Karen is far closer to Newton's original composition with the colour version of Grace being most radically different. A discussion of the relative features of the other two images, although potentially revealing as part of an in depth discussion of Stehli's practice, was felt to be unnecessary in the present context.

supports, is a partially coiled thin black cable which, becoming straight, extends behind the mirror and therefore out of sight. On the floor laying under the metal tripod leg we can see another cable, this time white, terminating in an upturned mains plug. To the left of the mirror we see a wall socket and further plugs, one engaged and another resting on the floor beneath it with its cable reaching upwards to whatever piece of electrical equipment is behind the mirror. The sockets have been made accessible via a hole cut into a light coloured panel perhaps plasterboard that appears to clad the entire room. This cladding is further evident in the mirrors reflection which not only takes up more of the image space but also reflects a wider view than in the other images we have been discussing. Here we can see the wall that extends behind the backdrop and where this meets the ceiling the plasterboard cladding appears crudely cut around a ceiling beam. What also becomes visible in this wider view, afforded by the mirror's reflection, is not only the bottom edge of the backdrop paper but also its top where it joins to the clad wall and, perhaps most significantly, its right hand edge which we can see extending down from the wall and curving onto the grey floor. We have, then, a number of elements here which seem to indicate that we are viewing a studio space. The white painted walls and ceiling, the utilitarian cladding, the trailing mains leads when combined with the presence of more obviously photographic equipment (tripods, coiled and stretched thin black leads) seem indicative of a space that is far more readily identifiable as belonging to a studio. The distinctive curve of the backdrop paper too, combined with its visible leading edge and wall mounted roll fixing means that, unlike the Newton image, even if the players in this scene were removed we would be left in little doubt as to the nature of the space we observe. The backdrop here is still functioning as the desert island domain of the model, once more subverted by Stehli who again has colonised it in a parody of Newton's original self-reflexive gesture. Again we get the foregrounding of

the agency of the photographer and the awareness of our own act of looking; but here we also begin to get a sense of how the studio as a space can be thought of as playing its own distinctive role in these complex dynamics. By showing us to a far greater degree how this backdrop is demarcated from, yet still exists within, the studio Stehli's image seems to invite a consideration of the conception of spaces that Beatrice Colomina has identified as being integral to the production of the modern subject. In discussing how certain areas of modernist domestic dwellings become demarcated as akin to theatre boxes overlooking the social spaces in the house Colomina makes the point that these same spaces are equally susceptible to becoming themselves overlooked, observed. "The "voyeur" in the "theatre box" has become the object of another's gaze; she is caught in the act of seeing, entrapped in the very moment of control. In framing a view, the theatre box also frames the viewer. It is impossible to abandon the space, let alone leave the house, without being seen by those over whom control is being exerted. Object and subject exchange places. Whether there is actually a person behind either gaze is irrelevant' (Colomina, 1992: 82) Stehli's image appears to propose that the play of controlled and controlling gazes that becomes enacted in the studio is similarly determined according to specific demarcations of physical space. She does this by simply placing herself, as Newton had done, in the 'wrong' space whilst continuing to fulfil her role as photographer; subject and object positions become not simply reversed but conflated, problematizing orthodox conceptions of space and implicating these in prescribed ways of looking. By virtue of the mirror that Stehli photographs into, we as viewers not only become witness to this transgression but are furthermore forced to consider the agency of the photographer and therefore the role of photography itself. The studio through its functionality as an 'apparatus for producing visibility' (Lalvani, 1996: 66) extends the notions of physical space as being implicated in regimes of power

to include this visibility. Photography in enabling and constituting this production of visibility complicates the demarcation of space that Colomina articulates in relation to the domestic dwelling. This photographic dimension demands that consideration must be given to an outside viewer, outside not in the sense of Colomina's outside that is framed within the interior through a particular window, but outside in a wider sense; one that incorporates the detached, deferred and diffuse gaze of the cultural discourses through which the images of studio production become disseminated.⁴⁶

When we first encounter Stehli's image, the immediate impression is that we, as observers, are located within the studio space in front of the studio backdrop on which we see the naked model and the figure of Stehli with her camera. We appear to have a relatively conventional viewpoint albeit one that has become highlighted by the wider than normal view and confused by the presence of Stehli as photographer. The image is not comfortable to look at however, it seems to engender a viewing position that is both intrusive and unwelcome. This is suggested both by Grace, whose stern downward gaze returns our own, and by Stehli whose camera points directly out towards us. The camera lens here seems to act as equivalent to the rustling of leaves that alerts Sartre, peeking through the keyhole, to his own presence in relation to the gaze of the other; catching us looking (Sartre and Warnock, 2003: 284) (Lacan, 1998 84). It is perhaps through this consideration of the camera's gaze that we start to question this image further and to

⁴⁶ In the Image Factory Paul Frosh describes the 'mission rhetoric' of commercial images in terms of how the destination of an image; its 'ultimate engagement with the social experience of consumers' determines the decision making of photographers, photographic agencies and advertisers. In relation to stock images he notes a temporality that is both 'ontological' and 'teleological' that both defines the very essence of the image and 'provides the ultimate legitimisation and authority for the sequence of system decisions' that this image goes through from photographer to consumer. I would argue that a similar trajectory will be evident in any form of commercial photography meaning that the regimes of power exercised within the studio space cannot be considered as occurring independently but are in fact largely determined by the deferred and impersonal gaze of an imagined consumer response.(Frosh 2003: 158)

realise that it is in fact this very same image, the one we are seeing, that Stehli's camera has taken, and that we are observing a reflection. This is particularly disconcerting because we inevitably have to consider how the camera, that seconds before, we experienced as intrusive and invasive, as interrogating our own voyeuristic position, is in fact manifesting the very viewpoint we now inhabit. Our own gaze, our own fetishizing look becomes revealed as, itself, controlled. What Stehli's image suggests here is a kind of reciprocal relationship between observer and image implicating both our own complicity in the regimes of power that it maintains whilst simultaneously exposing, as deluded, our own subjective autonomy as viewers in relation to it. The precise moment when we get 'caught looking' by Stehli's lens only to realise that we are also seeing through this lens serves to undermine our perceived mastery of the image. This disjunction or rift that opens between the act of looking and seeing ourselves looking recalls Lacan's description of the anamorphous shape that hovers in Holbein's Ambassadors. The idea that the camera lens itself can be associated with a particular awareness of the gaze as *objet petit a* within the studio is something that we have suggested already and the disquieting reciprocal gaze of Stehli's lens seems to mobilise such considerations. Lacan's use of Paul Valery's line Je me voyais me voir (I saw myself seeing myself) in The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis in order to illustrate the presence of the gaze in the scopic dimension seems particularly apt here and is commonly invoked in relation to Stehli's work (Baker, 2009: 8) (Santaccatterina, 2003: 23) .

Red Turning (2000)



Figure 4: Jemima Stehli *Red Turning* 2000

I saw myself seeing myself appears relevant to both the viewer's position in relation to the images Stehli creates and to her own position within them. This becomes further explored in another body of work from this time which includes *Headless Orange* (2000), *Red Turning* (2000) and *Grey-Green Painting* (2000). These works alongside another series *Strip* (2000)⁴⁷ derive their respective elements and strategies from the Newton pastiches

⁴⁷ *Strip* is a series of photographs produced between 1999 and 2000. In each Stehli is pictured against a coloured studio backdrop with her back to the camera in various states of undress. In each she faces a seated male figure who controls the camera via a long cable release. The male figures in these images are prominent figures in the art world; writers, curators, critics and dealers including Adrian Searle, Matthew

but appear by comparison relatively simple and straightforward. The aesthetic language adopted in these images makes reference to the paintings of Francis Bacon and therefore can be seen as consistent with Stehli's propensity for working within a pre-determined, male visual territory. By not including another model, nor the mirror in these works Stehli has stripped back the multiple and complex significations of the *Self Portraits*, picturing just herself as both model and photographer within the studio. This is not to suggest that these works are simplistic, however, for they seem to conflate and render implicit the complexities of the Newton based images; condensing them into an intense meditation on the relationship between subject/object that becomes played out in the photographic studio.

This body of work, dating from the same intense period of production as the Self Portraits and Strip series 2000-2001, has been collectively described as 'monochromes' (Slyce, 2003: 18) because they all share a characteristic large expanse of colour, this being generally reflected in the title of each work. In each of these works the formula is consistent; a roll of single coloured backdrop paper is pictured extending from a pole which runs parallel with and very close to the top of the image. This pole is suspended at either end from hooks attached to the studio wall. The monochromatic backdrop paper hangs down from the pole, curving onto the floor with its leading edge visible and running parallel with and close to the bottom edge of the picture frame. The side edges of the backdrop are similarly visible running close to and parallel with the sides of the image but these extend beyond the frame near its base as the backdrop extends towards us having visibly curved to meet the floor. As we have noted such rolls of

Collings and John Slyce. Stehli would begin to strip for the seated figure who had been instructed to take the picture by squeezing the shutter release at whatever point they felt appropriate.

monochromatic studio backdrop paper are a common feature of contemporary studios being used to isolate objects, allowing these to become pictured free from the clutter and distraction of any recognisable environment. In effect what Stehli has done in each of these works is to use the backdrop in a conventional manner but by adopting a wider viewpoint than usual has afforded us a view of all four of its edges and consequently the studio walls and floor between these edges and the boundaries of the picture frame. Unlike the other images we have been describing there is no pictured mirror in these works, the backdrop and its visible edges are pictured here directly and we therefore cannot see the camera. What we can see, located on the backdrop, in each of these works is Stehli herself, usually naked (both with and without high heeled shoes), holding the bulb of a long cable release, the tube of which hangs from her hand and extends towards us across the backdrop covered floor beyond its leading edge across the strip of visible studio floor and continuing beyond the bottom of the frame. The ‘square-on’ frontal camera position together with the central point at which this tube leaves the frame gives the strong impression that Stehli is, via the cable release, operating the camera which has taken the image we are observing.

In each of the images Stehli appears more or less centrally located on the backdrop paper which is almost certainly 8ft wide (a standard width for full length portraiture) hangs approximately 8ft down the wall and extend maybe 6ft across the floor. What differentiates these images from each other is the colours of the paper, Stehli’s own demeanour, objects visible on the studio floor and relatively small variations in the amount of wall and floor visible between the backdrop and the frame edges. There are four main series or groups which can be distinguished within this body of work; those taken against an orange backdrop *Headless Orange* (2000) and *Body Painting* (2000); those

taken against a red backdrop *Red Turning* (2000) and *Red Crouch* (2000); those taken against a Grey-Green backdrop *Grey Green Painting* (2000) and those taken against a flesh coloured backdrop *Flesh* (2000). In each of these works Stehli seems to be enacting a physical performance, the image representing a moment which Stehli herself has chosen by triggering the cameras shutter via the cable release in her hand. Through the shapes and movements that Stehli makes with her body, the specific colours chosen and her use of the triptych format, these works make direct reference to the paintings of Francis Bacon; the coloured backdrops providing Stehli with a photographic equivalent to the large monochromatic fields of paint on which Bacon painted his distorted and blurred figures. Bacon often painted his figures from photographs and cinematic images and Stella Santacatterina notes that Stehli's 'artistic operation of performing photography brings us to the roots of Bacon's work.... Carry[ing] the immediacy and ephemerality of time that Bacon had fixed in his painting' (Santacatterina inStehli and Burrows, 2003: 26). This aspect of the work whilst not of primary concern to our enquiry needs to be noted but I suggest that it is not Stehli's primary concern here either. Stehli's strategy of inhabiting the visual space of previous (and conspicuously) male artists provides her with a particular platform within which and from which to perform her practice. The practice itself is seldom a straightforward critique of the images it draws from, the more apparent feminist implications often being, themselves, undermined by her apparently narcissistic self-presentation (Schwabsky, 2001). It is the more metaphysical questions around the nature of representation, emerging in the midst of these complex pastiches, that come to the fore. Of particular interest here is the way that, in the monochromes, Stehli embodies both photographer and model and thereby draws attention to the complex subject/object relationships that become played out within the studio.

To see how Stehli achieves this it will be useful to describe an image from this body of work in more detail. *Red Turning* (2000) features a red backdrop in the manner we have described. The majority of this image is consequently red but details of the studio setting are evident where the frame edge has been allowed to extend beyond the edge of the backdrop. Stehli stands naked save for high heeled red shoes on the red backdrop where it has curved onto the floor. She stands just left of centre with her body oriented away from us towards the backdrop covered wall but seemingly caught in the process of turning her head and upper body back towards us. Her body is half rotated in this way but her head is further rotated towards us. This movement appears to have been rapid; her hair being flicked out, away from her head; frozen in a seeming defiance of gravity by the split second duration of the photographic exposure. Stehli holds the trigger of the cable release in her hand from which its thin black cable hangs to the floor before snaking out towards us from the bottom of the frame. Stehli has apparently chosen to release the shutter (and probably synchronously fired the studio flash heads) via this cable at the exact moment when her gaze meets that of the camera. Stehli has here simplified even further the complex series of interrelated subject positions pictured by Newton, not only embodying the look of Newton and his wife but also the fetishized object/model as well. The collapsed object subject relationship thus becomes even more emphatically stated in this image with any clear distinction between model and photographer removed...Stehli is here, undeniably, both. What interests us here is the role played by the studio in this narcissistic exchange and here we can see a similar simplification of the ideas proposed by Newton's image. The edge of the backdrop that we identified as signalling most clearly the studio apparatus is again reiterated; all four edges are visible, but only just. The image becomes impossible to read without consideration of the generic fantasy space conventionally afforded by a plain coloured

studio backdrop. Simultaneously however the image is impossible to read only in these terms because the single minded focus afforded by the red backdrop becomes undermined on all sides by the presence of the studio highlighting that this fantasy space is constructed within it.⁴⁸ Just as we can't maintain a definitive reading of Stehli as either subject or object we similarly cannot maintain a reading of the space she is in as fantasy or real. Stehli's demeanour within this space too seems to mirror and reiterate these contradictory readings. Her nudity, body shape, and sexualised footwear align with norms of fashion or glamour yet her expressive performative gestures and possession of the cable release seem anomalous. Even the direct address to the viewer's subjective position, a relationship figured within Newton's original and reiterated in Stehli's Self Portrait pastiches becomes here condensed. The camera may no longer be visible in the frame but the presence of the cable release extending out towards our viewing position and thereby emphatically aligning this with that of the camera again serves as a reminder of our own agency and mediated position. The studio becomes visible as a space that promotes a specific way of looking; a fetishized mode of looking that has become naturalised through social and cultural convention. Stehli's images seem to alert us to our own part in this form of looking through deliberately staged contradictions that challenge a prescribed reception of generic studio imagery. What Stehli also seems to suggest however is that these conventions seem to mask an ambiguous set of subject object relationships; ones that if explored more fully might start to reveal how the studio space itself functions in both forming and distorting these ambiguities.

⁴⁸ David Campany remarks on how the critical studio practices developed by artists in the late 1960's and through the 1970's, whilst frequently depicting the appearance of other kinds of spaces, were still intended to be read as studios images. 'Their illusionism is undercut by the attention they draw to the fact of their construction' (Campany, 2011: 15). The illusionism in Stehli's monochrome images rather than pointing outwards, is that of an environment that is explicitly already of the studio. The picturing of peripheral information serves, therefore, to elaborate a critique of the space of the studio itself providing a way to question the construction of meaning that becomes played out within it.

A useful way to begin to address these suggestions is through consideration of how object and subject positions become addressed within the realm of perception. Particularly pertinent in this respect are the theories proposed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his posthumously published *The Visible and The Invisible*. Here Merleau-Ponty suggests that in our perceptual relationship to the world there is a chiastic intertwining of experience; subject and object are entangled and cannot be separated. ‘The chiasm, reversibility, is the idea that every perception is doubled with a counter-perception (Kant’s real opposition), is an act with two faces, one no longer knows who speaks and who listens. Speaking-listening, seeing-being seen, perceiving-being perceived circularity (it is because of it that it seems to us that perception forms itself *in the things themselves Activity=passivity*)’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1969: 264). Merleau-Ponty discusses the body as ‘...a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them’. It belongs both ‘to the order of the object and the order of the subject’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1969: 137). This double belonging for Merleau-Ponty creates a complicated relationship between the lived body where sensory perception occurs and the world of objects of which it forms a part but yet is simultaneously detached. As Scott Drake succinctly summarises ‘The body is more than an object ... ‘it is that by which there are objects’. While the body is a necessary precondition for the experience of objects it differentiates itself from those objects by being the very means by which they are experienced.’ (Drake, 2005: 56). The body is an object but unlike other objects in that it perceives; it is ‘an object that never leaves me’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 92). Merleau-Ponty argues that this is a situation that can never be fully resolved and creates ‘a paradox of being’ where between the body as sensible and the body as sentient there is ‘the abyss that separates the In Itself from the For Itself’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1969: 136). This is the intertwining or the chiasm where ‘he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is

possessed by it' (Merleau-Ponty, 1969: 134) and where 'my body as a visible thing is contained within the full spectacle. But my seeing body subtends this visible body and all the visibles with it. There is a reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other.'

(Merleau-Ponty, 1969: 138).

In *Red Turning* Stehli uses herself as image and image maker to incorporate the notion of a perceiving body and the body as an object of perception. The two are intertwined are one and the same. This reading when reintroduced to the conventional studio images from which Stehli draws, figures them as a kind of separation of the body as an object and consequently the studio as an apparatus that seeks to produce this separation through the ideologically determined sublimation of commercial practice. The studio can be argued as a space in which such an intertwining of perception is intercepted by the photographic act in an attempt to separate perception from its intertwined enmeshed relationship between the flesh of the body and the flesh of the world.

Lacan draws upon Merleau-Ponty's ideas in order to formulate his own arguments on the nature of the gaze and in particular the distinction to be made between the function of the eye and that of the gaze. Lacan points out that Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible* goes beyond the considerations of visual phenomenology since it acknowledges 'the dependence of the visible on that which places us under the eye of the seer.' and indicates a path with which to circumscribe 'the pre-existence of the gaze'. (Lacan, 1998: 72). By taking Merleau-Ponty's conception of the flesh of the world which pre-exists any seeing subject and furthermore is that from which this subject/seer emerges as eye, Lacan postulates the presence a pre-existent gaze. He makes the point that by showing us that perception is 'not in me, that it is on the objects that it apprehends' (Lacan, 1998: 80)

Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that the statement 'I see myself seeing myself' can only be an illusion of consciousness. (Lacan, 1998: 82, 83)⁴⁹

In this sense the intertwining that Stehli's practice seems to invoke through its visible conflation of subject positions can be considered to allude to the presence of the Lacanian gaze, not in what it shows but in what it fails to show. For Lacan the gaze is what becomes omitted, elided in the illusion of seeing oneself seeing oneself. Stehli's work seems to interrogate this premise as it has become manifest in various representational practices. Thus Stehli deliberately seeks to upturn accepted conventions of looking, inhabiting the aesthetic environments of existing generic practice and the visible studio spaces that provide their and her own sites of production. Stehli shows us her attempts to see herself seeing herself and she shows us how our own looking plays its part in this. The results seem at once banal and profound; both matter of fact and obvious, yet somehow, disconcerting and strange beyond their apparently prosaic bluntness. Stehli's use of controlled spaces, spaces that seem to restrict her autonomy and agency as an artist, serve to provide the very arena within which considerations around the, always present yet elided, nature of the gaze become inferred. Stehli sees herself seeing herself but it is always from the point of view of another; be it Helmut Newton or Francis Bacon and it is this aspect that hints at the presence of the Gaze because it figures this very seeing as itself external. 'From the moment that this gaze appears, the subject tries to adapt himself to it, he becomes that punctiform object, that point of vanishing being with which the subject confuses his own failure....the subject

⁴⁹ Lacan draws upon Merleau-Ponty's description of a leather fur lined glove that appears 'turned inside out' ('note the way in which the leather envelops the fur in a winter glove') in order to illustrate 'that consciousness, in its illusion of seeing itself seeing itself, finds its basis in the inside-out structure of the gaze.'(Lacan, 1998: 82) (Merleau-Ponty, 1969: 263)

manages, fortunately to symbolize his own vanishing and punctiform bar in the illusion of the consciousness of *seeing oneself seeing oneself*, in which the gaze is elided.'(Lacan, 1998; 83).

The point here is that the complexities of the subject object dialectic that Stehli is engaging in is not just as part of a dialectic of identity and power; rather it can be considered as representing an ambivalence that is built into the space of the studio itself. The structure of the apparatus is itself fundamental here but is commonly overlooked in critiques of Stehli's practice. What needs to be emphasized is that the space of the studio is materially constituted as a discursive structure and it is this that provides the conditions for the particular conceptions of the gaze that Stehli's practice serves to mobilise.

Recent considerations of the studio

Steven Edwards noted in 1990 how 'in recent years photographic history and theory has turned increasingly to the studio as a site of ideology' and that 'at the same time radical photographic practice has moved into the studio providing women and black photographers with a productive space in which to explore questions of identity and hegemonic representation' (Edwards, 1990: 63). Edwards notes that such practices are 'forcefully demonstrated in the recent work of Jo Spence, in which photographic therapy sessions in the studio result in images which erupt as the repressed 'unofficial consciousness' of the Family Album.'(Edwards, 1990: 63). John Roberts observes that such studio practices reflected the 'intellectual trajectory' of theorists such as Laura Mulvey, Stephen Heath and Victor Burgin and provided photographers with a site that

'allowed access to orders of experience outside the naturalistic' (Roberts, 1998: 154). He also points out that Laura Mulvey, who's 'Visual Pleasures...' essay was 'a considerable influence' also championed such work noting that 'By producing constructed images in the studio 'the photographic image can be organised to express an abstract idea, an argument, the interior world of desire and imagination'" (Roberts, 1998: 154). The studio becomes a space in which to explore, through photographic practice, the psychoanalytic ideas that had emerged initially in relation to film theory a space where 'desire, the look, fetishism – could be given corporeal form and performed'. Roberts goes so far as to suggest that the studio acts here as 'a site of the imaginary itself, a place that in its staging of the dialectic between desire and lack foregrounds unreadability as the very condition of reading photographic images.' (Roberts, 1998: 155) Jemima Stehli's practice is notable here not just because it is clearly aligned with these earlier practices but because it makes the studio apparatus visible to us. Her practice therefore implicates the studio space in any construction of meaning; proposing visually Mulvey's and Robert's theorising of the space as 'a site of the imaginary'. The significance of the spaces and apparatus of photographic production suggested in Stehli's work has become itself of central concern within a number of photographic practices. This phenomena is noted by David Campany in his 2010 essay *The Scene of Photography and The Future of its Illusion: Photography's Blank Canvas* (Campany, 2010) which succinctly surveys the scene.

Campany remarks that there is an increasingly blurred line between studio photography and location photography as lighting becomes ever more portable and digital post production allows a far more relaxed attitude to image capture. The facilities offered by photographic studios are thus less of a necessity than in the past and Campany suggests that this may be a factor in the recent interest displayed by a number of photographers

who have chosen to ‘turn their cameras upon the studio and reflect upon what it is’.(Campany, 2010: 4) Campany cites the studies of studio spaces and equipment by Harry Watts and Broomberg and Chanarin as indicative of such recent practice noting that they ‘conjure up the pre-theatrical void and limitless potential of images past and future, picturing the spaces in which photographs have been and will be made.’(Campany, 2010: 4) Rather than providing a parallel with similar traditions in painting in which artists depict their own studio Campany suggests that such work by inevitably picturing ‘what is not there’ is more aligned with the idea of a ‘blank canvas’. ‘In picturing the studio space the photographer confronts at some level a *tabula rasa*’ or the ‘degree zero of the photograph.’(Campany, 2010: 4) This idea promotes consideration of the possibility of an equivalent to the monochrome in painting and an affinity with abstraction that suggests an alignment with other reflexive photographic practices that explore the material aspects of the medium. Campany thus finds a parallel between the photographing of the studio space and the concrete photography of Wolfgang Tillmans, James Welling, Lisa Oppenheim and Walaed Beshty; images that ‘seem to be recognisably photographic without having a recognisable referent or subject’.(Campany, 2010: 10) Whilst this is an avenue worth exploring it tends to lead us away from the details of the studio that are pictured in the studio images...as Campany acknowledges ‘there is still plenty to look at in these stripped stages of marked floors, electrical cables and de-featured surfaces’ (Campany, 2010: 4) even if they do inevitably signal an absence. In a sense it is the relationship between the material, prosaic, utilitarian, pragmatic apparatus; the space that it inhabits and the absences that it suggests that becomes lost in considering parallels with abstraction. Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin’s *American Landscapes* (2009) with its single minded focus on just one part of the

studio equipment provides us with a way to interrogate further the significance of the apparatus proposed in Jemima Stehli's practice.

Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin

Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin are London based photographers who, on their own admission, have never worked with photography "in the normal way".(Milliard, 2011: 15). Their ongoing practice in adopting a seemingly disparate array of strategies and techniques is not easy to categorize but is generally characterised by an obtuse conceptual approach that seeks to question the role of photography within various politically volatile domains. Typical examples of their practice are the series *Red House* (2006) in which they photographed the marks and drawings found on the walls of Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist Party headquarters; *The Day Nobody Died* (2008) in which the pair exposed a roll of colour photographic paper to light in an Afghan war zone in a gesture that sought to undermine notions that traditional war photography might somehow convey the horrors of conflict; and *To Photograph a Dark Horse in Low Light* (2013), an exploration of photography's relationship to race in which they used outdated Kodak film stock, notorious for its inability to render darker skin tones, in order to document a seldom witnessed tribal ritual in Gabon. '*American Landscapes*' (2009) takes as its subject the role of photography within American consumerist culture by picturing the materiality of the blank fantasy spaces it frequently represents.

For this series of work photographers Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin travelled across America photographing the interiors of commercial photographic studios. The

term ‘landscapes’ refers here not to the traditional conception of an external vista but to the blank featureless spaces created within these studios in order to picture products and celebrities. Broomberg and Chanarin photograph within these featureless ‘landscapes’ picturing the terrain on which the objects of American consumerism have become depicted within the domains of advertising, fashion and the culture of celebrity. The titles of the individual images simply indicate which recognisable commodity or company has been represented within the particular ‘landscape’ we are shown; Beyoncé, Revlon, Good Housekeeping, America’s Next Top Model, Volvo etc. By creating landscapes within the spaces where such familiar objects once stood Broomberg and Chanarin’s images seem to picture an absence as well as the material reality of the fantasy spaces in which such objects become represented. By picturing the ‘scenography for a free market economy’ Broomberg and Chanarin suggest that these blank landscapes are a contemporary equivalent to the ‘unbound possibilities’ that the American West represented to early pioneers (Broomberg and Chanarin, 2009). As Campany summarises ‘Where the real space of the American West was once also the imaginary space of the nation’s ideological projection, so the commercial studio came to assume a similar role in the virtualised era of image spectacle.’(Campany, 2010: 10). There is more at play here than arcane irony, for these images seem to generate a sense of absence and loss that belies both the commercial function of the subject matter and the postmodern rhetoric of their title. As their website suggests ‘These studio walls act as a blank screen on which any fantasy may be projected’(Broomberg and Chanarin, 2009) and it is the picturing of an apparatus which constructs such a fantasy space that serves to enrich our enquiry. Let us consider two images from American Landscapes in more detail *America’s Next Top Model* (2009) and *Beyoncé* (2009) each were exhibited as framed 60” x 40” C type prints.

America's Next Top Model (2009)



Figure. 5: Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin *America's Next Top Model* from the series *American Landscapes* 2009

What is perhaps most striking about Broomberg and Chanarin's 'American Landscapes' is how sparse they appear as images, the blankness of their depicted terrain being only interrupted by the occasional architectural or structural detail or marks that betray evidence of past use. *America's Next Top Model* is representative of this aesthetic strategy. The majority of the image surface is made up of an off white blank surface that only reveals itself as a studio 'cyclorama' or backdrop through the distinctive curve of its nearside edge that intrudes from the left of the image frame. This visible curved edge which forms a dark, triangular shape where it meets the frame edge allows the predominant blankness to be recognised as a tangible space; locating a sense of both the

presence of a floor and a wall which would otherwise be entirely disguised by the curved, evenly lit, uniform nature of the surface. The diegetic fantasy space is interrupted just enough for us to realise the nature of its fabrication yet the predominance of blankness denies us any further details and in a sense maintains the fantasy. Descending from the top edge of the frame is a rope which hangs down to the floor just to the right of the pictured curved edge we have described. This rope is therefore within the conventional fantasy space but appears incongruous in this setting; suggesting more a part of the studio paraphernalia, usually kept out of shot, rather than a product intentionally photographed within a commercial context. The rope seems to suggest as much an absence of something else as its own presence and this is further emphasised by the flat lighting which lacks the requisite dramatic emphasis characteristic of much commercial studio imagery. The impression, further implied by the images title, is that we have missed the main event...this is where something has happened....and a space in which further, similar, events will soon happen. This is not a clear cut example of what might be described as a 'behind the scenes look' at studio photography. Through a careful arrangement of its three main components which emphasize both the found nature of the scene and the aesthetic judgement of the photographer the image seems to encourage contemplation; it alludes to a significance that is both apparent yet uncertain. The blankness of the space is exploited by Broomberg and Chanarin and becomes foregrounded, its featureless surface providing a minimalist setting on which the intrusion of further elements appears simultaneously abstract and informative. We are, in short, held in this space; encouraged to contemplate both its prosaic function and its poetic significance.

Beyoncé (2009)



Figure 6: Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin *Beyoncé* from the series *American Landscapes* 2009

The title *Beyoncé* refers to the female vocalist who we thus imagine having been photographed within the scene depicted here. As with *America's Next Top Model* and many other images in this series we encounter an expansive surface; the almost ubiquitous requisite backdrop for much modern commercial studio photography. Again this is photographed in a way that both exploits the blankness of the backdrop as a screen but also avoids the visual tropes that would serve to fulfil its function as a commercial backdrop in conventional terms. That is, despite filling the frame, the backdrop is neither lit in order to create an illusion of a stark white or graduated featureless environment nor is it being employed here *as* an environment for a featured

and privileged object. The backdrop or cyclorama pictured here thus *becomes* the object of contemplation. *Beyoncé* as an image is totally devoid of architectural details, in fact it contains no physical object at all except for the backdrop itself the surface of which fills the entire image plane. Despite this however *Beyoncé* gives the impression of a definitive and tangible space more than most from the series, the result of a soft directional light emanating from an undisclosed and out of shot source to the left of the image. This gentle raking light has the effect of making readily apparent the curve of the backdrop, differentiating through light and shade where this lies horizontally across the floor and where it rises to form a vertical screen. What is also revealed by this directional light is a large number and variety of markings on the floor of this surface. These appear to be marks left behind from whatever activity or activities have taken place in this space. The suggestion is that these marks are those made during a photographic shoot involving the eponymous singer. They consist of a variety of indentations, scuffs and tread marks that suggest the movement of people in a variety of footwear and the deployment of an object or objects on wheels or castors. The light falls across this surface emphasising its pitted and scuffed appearance and this helps to establish a sense of scale which would otherwise be difficult to determine. The evidence suggests a large studio space one that would accommodate perhaps a number of models and props allowing them to be pictured in the seamless white environment that studio flash and judicious use of exposure would further combine to provide. That we are presented here only with the space in which something has apparently taken place; encouraged to decipher this supposed activity only through the evidence of its traces strongly suggests the kind of forensic photographs used by the police in order to document a crime scene before the evidence disappears. It also therefore draws comparison with what has become known within the realm of contemporary photographic practice as 'late photography' (Campany, 2003,

Campany, 2006) a term that is usually being associated with landscape imagery also furthers the analogy encouraged by the series' title. Late photography is most commonly associated with war photography and can be thought of as a more contemplative and thoughtful response to events (particularly conflict) than the traditional photojournalistic approach of capturing action as it happens. Photography has, since the 1960's, been gradually eclipsed by video and television as an effective means to document conflict and this has given rise to a newfound interest by a number of photographers in documenting the traces that events leave behind rather than the events themselves. As Campany puts it "The event is passed over for its traces. Here reportage takes a forensic turn and in doing so it openly accepts that it will be an insufficient and partial account of things. Most often it lands upon leftovers and signs of damage, both of which are highly photogenic but not easy to decipher. The image becomes a trace of a trace. More to the point this is an overtly allegorical mode of photography."(Campany, 2006) Campany's article concerns Broomberg and Chanarin's series *The Red House* which employs this approach in showing us the drawings and scratches on Iraqui prison cell walls but in American Landscapes it is adopted not in order to highlight war, atrocity or some other trauma. Here the seemingly innocuous studio photoshoot becomes cast in these terms as some localised and particular event; the traces of which when considered through the lens of Broomberg and Chanarin's camera seem to symbolize the larger forces of capitalist consumerism within which it operates. The reason that such work is so effective in promoting a contemplation on the nature of wider forces is perhaps the combination of the very specific (this mark, this bullet hole) and the uncertain (what made this mark is absent); in short a play between presence and absence. The title of the work gives us the territory within which we can only imagine what has happened. This allegorical aspect promotes a powerful play of fantasy precisely because it pictures an absence. This not only

encourages consideration of the political and ideological contexts identified by the works title it also inevitably links these with the more internal processes of loss and desire.

A useful way to consider such practice, one that seems to encourage both ideological and psychoanalytical readings, is in relation to Louis Althusser's interpretation of Lacan's concept of the imaginary. Althusser as we have observed provides a theoretical conception of ideology that allowed Baudry and Metz to argue that cinema can be seen both as an essentially Foucauldian apparatus and as a signifier of the imaginary. Whilst we have discussed in some detail the way that Baudry and Metz conceive of cinema in these terms Broomberg and Chanarin's photographs provide an example through which we can begin to articulate the conflation of the discursive with the imaginary in a way that not only draws in the studio more convincingly but also demonstrates how photographic practice such as this might be considered to embody such complex theoretical ideas proposing them in visual terms. Broomberg and Chanarin's images provide an excellent visualisation of how ideology is manifest in the materiality of institutional practices and also how it incorporates an imaginary dimension which relates to the primary psychic forces of the individually interpellated subject. The way that a social apparatus such as cinema might be considered as somehow derived from and shaped around the psychic economy of the subjects it incorporates is vital to our arguments on the photographic studio along similar lines. The blank spaces pictured by Broomberg and Chanarin can be argued to be sites of interpellation embodying the ideological principles of late capitalism and the commodity culture that this engenders whilst providing a space in which individuals become constituted as subjects and represented as, literally, products of it. The apparent neutrality of the pictures becomes highlighted as deceptive, belying a coercive and predetermined agenda reminding us that

subjectivity itself cannot be independent of language. Language will always precede the subject and it is only through language that subjectivity can be constituted. The studio cycloramas here become evidence of ideology as it becomes manifest within an apparatus; an example of Althusser's belief that 'ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice or practices' (Althusser, 2001: 112). Althusser draws upon Lacan's Imaginary in proposing that ideology does not simply suggest a 'false consciousness' that presupposes an accessible reality, but rather exists as a necessary misrecognition of reality as such, which can only be accomplished within the symbolic order that structures it. The symbolic order for the child represents an escape from the imaginary mother child relationship and is accessed via the metaphor of The Name of the Father which replaces the mother's desire. Althusser points out that even the pre Oedipal imaginary however is still governed by the symbolic. '..the first moment in which the child lives its immediate intercourse with a human being (its mother) without recognizing it practically as the symbolic intercourse it is (i.e. as the intercourse of a small child with a human mother) – *is marked and structured in its dialectic by the dialectics of the Symbolic Order itself*' (Althusser, 1984: 162 italics in original). The point here is that the symbolic, structured through language, pre-exists the subject so that the words he speaks can never truly be his own. As this exists in the domain of the psyche for Lacan it becomes reflected within society for Althusser as a misrecognition of autonomy. The individual can only be constituted as a subject through interpellation into existing ideology and however much this individual believes himself a free agent he can only be so, in the sense of misrecognising himself as such. 'What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live' (Althusser, 1984: 39) It is this space of misrecognition that becomes figured in the blank floors of *American Landscapes*; a space of

apparent freedom and possibility, further suggested through the title but, unable to exist without the controlling structures within which it is contained. The title is important to the reading of this work, it points us in a definite direction but also uses a sense of postmodern irony and deadpan humour that seem to mock or undermine the values it initially seems to represent. The assumed naturalness of the traditional American landscape, as embodied in the work of Ansel Adams for instance, becomes implicated as itself no less an ideological construction than these stark backgrounds. The work hinges on the relationship between the title, laden with cultural significance, and the images which utilise photography's propensity for seemingly objective revelation within the confines of a subjective point of view. This conceptual strategy is a trademark of Broomberg and Chanarin's photographic practice where the meaning of work relies on the contradiction between what is seen and what might be expected to be seen...photography becomes used to undermine the naturalised assumptions suggested by the title whilst a degree of humour implies that nothing should be taken for granted. The absences pictured by Broomberg and Chanarin suggest spaces that are waiting to be filled, stages onto which subjectivity might become performed and where fantasy might be projected in the making of images. The knowledge of what has been photographed on these sets (cars, celebrities, models) highlights the ideologically constrained demarcation of this apparently neutral space whereas the overall title *American Landscapes* suggests that such constraints are implicated in conceptions of reality in general. Althusser argues that the ritualised actions of individuals collectively reflect an ideology which although imaginary becomes '..inscribed, within the material existence of an ideological apparatus, be it only a small part of that apparatus' (Althusser, 1984: 42). However Althusser stresses that an ideological effect of *recognition* creates what he calls 'obviousness'; such an obviousness would be the belief in oneself as a free and ethical subject, or the

transparency of language that makes a word ‘name a thing’ (Althusser, 1984: 45). This is the consciousness of ideology and in *American Landscapes* this would be the obviousness of a white studio backdrop being used to create a certain professional and uncluttered look for use in commercial photography. But as Althusser points out ‘this recognition only gives us the ‘consciousness of our incessant (eternal) practice of ideological recognitionin no sense does it give us the knowledge of the mechanism of this recognition.’ (Althusser, 1984: 47) What Broomberg and Chanarin’s *American Landscapes* achieves is a kind of unmasking of something that by definition cannot be seen; is consistently misrecognised. American landscapes through a subtle juxtaposition and interplay of obviousnesses manages to suggest the underlying mechanisms that structure our conscious knowledge of ideology. The studio here is used to signify the ‘imaginary distortion of the ideological representation of the real world’(Althusser, 1984: 38) not because it is used in order to represent fantasy (that much is obvious) but rather because in doing so it masks a constraining agenda that although misrecognised and unconscious is inscribed in the material existence of the studio apparatus itself through the very practices of the subjects it constrains.

Althusser’s appropriation of Lacanian concepts as a way to expand on Marx’s theory of ideology provided a way to theorize ideological apparatus such as cinema in terms of its unconscious association with the primal scene. We have already applied some of the concepts proposed through the various incarnations of apparatus theory to the photographer’s studio in order to show how this too has similar yet unique unconscious associations. The emphasis in such apparatus theory tends to be on the psychoanalytic effects engendered for the individual situated within a particular apparatus, on how precisely subjectivity becomes manifest within these environments. So far we have

concentrated on the wider ideological associations proposed by Broomberg and Chanarin's American Landscapes and this seems appropriate in light of their overtly political if somewhat generalised message. The specific allusion to the kind of Lacanian associations theorised in relation to the studio space however is also evident in these works in their deliberate representation of lack. Althusser's conception of ideology in drawing from Lacan's Mirror Stage essay emphasizes the misrecognition inherent in 'the relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence' (Althusser, 1984: 39) and casts this as a 'human constant' (Jay, 1993: 375). The 'subjection of the subject not only to his mirror image, but also to a meta-Subject like God, whose imitation was then valorised' (Jay, 1993: 375). Martin Jay points out that Althusser's overlooks Lacan's later writing in the Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis and as such his emphasis stays with this imaginary relationship (Jay, 1993: 377). The imaginary 'gestalt of corporeal wholeness' (Jay, 1993: 368) is linked with the gaze in that it originates in a specular projection but it does not take into account the aspect of lack that figures the gaze as the *objet a* and connects it with the desire of the other. Broomberg and Chanarin's blank cycloramas appear lacunary, suggesting readings that extend this imaginary subject position in the direction of a split subject. The images appear to show very little but at the same time we are made aware that this apparent lack of information is pivotal; the blankness is not only ideologically functional it is also an emptiness at the centre of an apparatus; an 'ideal point' where the 'image comes into being' yet 'in which no tangible component to the apparatus is situated.' (Freud, 1999: 349). From this perspective the studio spaces pictured in American Landscapes become, like Freud's microscope, analogous with the human psyche. They begin to picture the subject in terms of being structured around a central lack, the lacuna within which the Lacanian subject 'sets up the function of an object *qua* lost object' (Lacan, 1998: 185). The question that this raises

is whether both readings might be sustained? In other words Broomberg and Chanarin's work suggests that the dimension of an individual's subjection to prevailing ideology (both unconsciously structuring and simultaneously misrecognising this) cannot be solely considered through reference to the imaginary realm it must also take into account 'the disjunction between desiring subject and its unattainable object.' (Jay, 1993: 368)⁵⁰

Through drawing out the implicit psychic dimension of Stehli's and Broomberg and Chanarin's images we become aware of the potential for photographic practice to critically engage with the studio space in similar terms. What also becomes apparent is the lack of existing practice that seeks to foreground this psychic dimension. The works we have examined so far have taken as their primary concern the role of the studio within the wider discourses of feminist art practice and postmodern ideological critique. We have seen how the studio as the mise en scene of desire has been implicated in both cases but there is a sense that within the work these considerations whilst profound are simply cast as symptomatic of the more political discourses under consideration. We have in short needed to extract these meanings to somehow propose that they exist not only within these discourses but at a level that begins to suggest their inherence in the physical apparatus itself. We have seen how the studio as psychic space can be usefully analysed in relation to these wider discourses and this has provided a more in depth consideration of the theoretical ideas laid out in the last chapter particularly in the way

⁵⁰ Zizek describes how ideological space is made of non-bound, non-tied elements, floating signifiers which then become fixed at nodal points or *points de capiton*. Only then can they become parts of the structural network of meaning. (Zizek, 1990) Elisabeth Cowie summarises Zizek's arguments and observes that Lacan uses the term *points de capiton* to describe 'the fixing of the subject in the chain of desire, in signification.' She makes the point that 'Zizek seeks... to show, not that ideology is the same construction as the subject, but that in both, the fixing of meaning is never quite complete...there is always a left-over, a residue – the *objet petit a* – and thus a lack.' Zizek demonstrates that 'the trick of ideology is not the mask which hides something, but the fetish which masks the lack, the non-sense that the symbolic 'quilting' has sought to overcome, but which always fails.' (Cowie, 1990: 116)

they function in relation to distinct cultural practices. We are attempting here to further existing debates on the studio in the direction we have delineated but in doing so we are highlighting the absence of existing practice that might be considered to address these debates directly.

One further, and again distinctly postmodern practice, will perhaps prove most useful to further our enquiry at this point; that of Christopher Williams. William's is not included in Campion's survey perhaps because his practice does not appear to address the studio space directly but it is of particular interest here because when he does employ the studio it is in relation to an ongoing and complex engagement with the apparatus of photography.

Christopher Williams

Christopher William's practice is characterised by widely disparate subject matter photographed in a variety of styles and exhibited together in what Mark Godfrey has described as a collage of different genres that functions within the extended space of the gallery(Godfrey, 2008: 120). The relationship between the images is not readily apparent creating a 'slippery, nearly opaque field of reference and association'. (Simpson, 2006: 207) and this is further complicated by the addition of titles to the individual works that frequently contain an abundance of factual information relating to the image but not always concerning its immediate subject matter. Godfrey describes the experience of attending *Christopher Williams's For Example: Dix-Huit Leçons Sur La Société Industrielle (Revision 4)*, an exhibition held at Museu Serralves in Porto in 2006 as an 'extraordinary

and very perplexing awakening'..... 'Included in the show were photographs of cameras, jellyfish, plastic corn, Polish apartment blocks, German postal packages, women with shampooed hair, soap bars, wallpaper factories, bicycles, and so on. All these subjects were obviously important to the artist, and their juxtaposition certainly provoked me to ask why. But equally, the show raised questions with no obvious connection to the photographic subjects. How were the photographs made? What photographic histories and genres did they bring together? How were they installed? What other interventions had Williams made around them? What was the importance of the texts that surrounded the presentation of the photographs?'(Godfrey, 2008: 116). What becomes apparent through engaging with Williams' work is that it seems to address the apparatus of photographic production at many levels. The diversity of approaches and obtuseness of the associations has the effect of highlighting the huge array of discourses within which and through which photography functions. William's images are less about their immediate subjects and more about the elaborate backstory which has brought about their particular mode of appearance or pictured apparatus. Repeated motifs of the distinctive Kodak yellow within the images is mirrored in the exhibition text. Studio still life images of cameras appear like commercial advertising images but are accompanied by text that alerts us to the political situation within which those cameras became produced. Another studio still life showing plastic corn cobs arranged under a suspended Kodak three point reflection guide references the use of corn oil within the production of lenses and as a constituent of film emulsion. Through this diverse interplay of references and strategies William's practice proposes a view of photography that incorporates a multiplicity of forces that both produce the photographic and are simultaneously sustained by it. The way that Williams draws from and conflates ideas drawn from conceptual art (John Baldessari, Dan Graham), photographic modernist practices (Reiner

Patzch) and commercial photographic practices has been extensively discussed (Godfrey, Simpson et al)(Godfrey, 2008, Simpson, 2006) but for our purposes it is the photographic apparatus, and in particular that of the studio, that becomes visible through these strategies that is key. William's practice seems to reveal photography; its spaces, modes of operation, techniques, equipment, genres, institutions as a disparate yet distinct archive by setting it in relief against the multiple discourses through which it operates and within which it becomes implicated.⁵¹ This is of course a distinctively Foucauldian perspective but one that might facilitate a way to further narrow the gap between the two studio positions we have argued; the studio as a discursive formation and the studio as a mise-en-scene of desire.

⁵¹ In an interview from 2014 Christopher Williams describes the thinking behind his practice: 'I am trying to articulate systems, but I am also trying to slow them down. For example, I move into a system of production to separate the key elements—to push them apart—so I can understand their relationship to each other and how they function. That process gives me the insight to reassemble the elements to become useful in a new way for a different audience or for my own agenda, but also so that they reflect on their normal usage or function.'

'The idea is to get inside the mechanics of convention and to push the parameters to make those mechanics visible or to repurpose them; to make them useful to our time, and place them in relation to the history of those conventions to both criticize and comment on them.....My position in relationship to production is conventional but decentred..... At any one point I may choose to amplify just one element, or two elements, but within the show things accumulate into networks of focus within something that at first appears to be just a conventional display of pictures.' (Williams, 2014: 4)

Three Point Reflection Guide, © 1968 Eastman Kodak Company, 1968. (Meiko smiling),

Vancouver, B.C. April 6, 2005. 2005.



Figure 7: Christopher Williams *Three Point Reflection Guide, © 1968 Eastman Kodak Company, 1968. (Meiko smiling), Vancouver, B.C. April 6, 2005. 2005*

The sprawling and interrelated nature of William's practice might suggest that the analysis of a single image might easily miss many of the subtle yet profound associations that we have argued as its *raison d'être*. We need to be particularly attentive to the fact that this image not only pictures the studio apparatus but does so as part of a collection of images that function to suggest the depth and breadth of discourse within which this apparatus functions. William's practice is particularly pertinent to our enquiry in that it seems to bring into visibility those aspects of the photographic apparatus that are inherently invisible....the systems of power and knowledge which both determine it and within

which it operates. *Three Point Projection Guide, © 1968 ... (Meiko smiling)* (2005) is an image that employs a combination of strategies that encourage such associations. In common with much of William's work this image is in a self-conscious parodic mode, a pastiche of both commercial studio advertising photography and the technical imagery used in its production.

Three Point Projection Guide, © 1968 ... (Meiko smiling) (2005) pictures a young, thin, female model (Meiko) perhaps in her twenties. She is what might be characterised as conventionally attractive possessing the requisite attributes demanded by the fashion, advertising or glamour industries. She can be further described as cheerful and wholesome but without appearing overtly sexual or erotic; she is also somewhat unremarkable rather than distinctive. Meiko is pictured from the chest upward positioned to the left of centre against a plain dark grey studio backdrop. Her body is oriented to her right at about 45 degrees from the camera plain but her head is turned so that she looks over her left shoulder towards us. From her pose we can surmise that she is standing. Meiko engages us directly and smiles. She is wearing a yellow towel wrapped around her head and another yellow towel wrapped around her body which we can just see as it covers her chest at the bottom edge of the frame. Apart from these towels Meiko appears to be naked; these two factors combining to give a strong impression that she has just had a shower or bath. The actuality of this apparent situation is contradicted by a number of important factors however, the first being the obvious studio location. This combined with a clinical and perfectly controlled application of studio lighting, the overly pristine disposition and arrangement of the towels and the lack of any evidence of moisture on Meiko's skin suggest far more the artifice of the studio than any genuine domestic ablutions. This is underscored by the inclusion to the left of the image of the

Kodak Three Point Reflection Guide of the title which appears held by a clip which forms the end part of an armature protruding from the upper left edge of the frame roughly level with Meiko's forehead. The image itself seems to have been taken in a landscape or horizontal format in order to accommodate this usually unrepresented piece of studio apparatus and this further bolsters the idea that this image is neither a straightforward image of a girl who has had a bath nor a studio picture intended to replicate this domestic situation for some genuine commercial purpose.

The inclusion of this Kodak Reflection Guide appears to signify a type of image commonly referred to within the photographic industry as a *Shirley Card*. These are composite images which are used as calibration devices in order to facilitate the accurate depiction of colour and tone. Such images usually include stepped colour spectrum and greyscale charts and a representation of skin tone most commonly in the form of a singular white female model, studio lit, and wearing bright clothes. The inclusion of the Kodak Guide and the presence of an appropriate model wearing bright yellow here combine to create a strong allusion to this particular idiom, the implication being that a reference is being established in order to ensure that any form of subsequent reproduction will be able to successfully render both the Kodak yellow and convincing skin tone within the same image. What is significant here is, not the more common debates around the racial or sexual particularities of the model that have evolved around such images⁵², but rather the relationship between the model and the photographic

⁵² Lorna Roth explains: “Skin-colour balance” in still photography printing refers historically to a process in which a norm reference card showing a “Caucasian” woman wearing a colourful, high-contrast dress is used as a basis for measuring and calibrating the skin tones on the photograph being printed. The light skin tones of these women—named “Shirley” by male industry users after the name of the first colour test-strip-card model—have been the recognized skin ideal standard for most North American analogue photo labs since the early part of the twentieth century and they continue to function as the dominant norm.’ (Roth 2009)

apparatus⁵³. In a reversal of the conventional relationship, where the apparatus is deployed in the effective depiction of a subject, William's pictures a scene in which the model's depiction exists purely in order to show the apparatus. In Shirley Cards the notion of individuality becomes evacuated from the space and is present simply in order to reveal the technical apparatus. There is no psyche present in such images there is only the body as material photographic product.

The portrait style that tends to be used for Shirley Cards is itself derived from a mainstream glamour and advertising tradition whose representations of subjectivity can be argued as equally vacuous. Indeed most of William's series of images featuring Meiko in this role do not include the Kodak guide and therefore reference this wider field. The effectiveness of Williams' pastiches reflects a ready acceptance of these visual tropes made instantly recognisable through their longstanding widespread cultural dissemination. Meiko's expression and demeanour serves as a conscious parody of this type of imagery her role being portrayed with a subtle but nonetheless pronounced exaggeration.⁵⁴ In the image we have chosen to analyse here it is the inclusion of the reflection guide that invites a particular consideration of the role of the apparatus in the establishment of such conventions. By placing the model within the context of a technical referencing aid where the technical apparatus becomes privileged he pictures her as a part of that apparatus, a point of reference, a standard or norm, necessary to ensure its correct and consistent function. Within this context the models name would

⁵³ Broomberg and Chanarin's project *To photograph the details of a dark horse in low light* 2012 the title of which 'derives from the coded phrase used by Kodak to describe the capabilities of a new film stock developed in the early 80's to address the inability of their earlier films to accurately render dark skin.' (Broomberg & Chanarin 2014) explores notions of racism in relation to Kodak film stock and makes use of several appropriated and modified Shirley Cards in its realisation. (Broomberg & Chanarin 2014)

⁵⁴ I am reminded of the waiter that Sartre observes as carrying out his role with an almost automaton precision because he is playing at being a waiter rather than actually being a waiter (Sartre and Warnock, 2003)

not normally be known, its inclusion in Williams' title therefore seems ironic serving to underscore and signal the evacuation of subjectivity that usually characterises such imagery. The picturing of Meiko as part of the apparatus inevitably suggests that this apparatus incorporates the model not as an individual but as an image. The image of the subject in this sense emanates directly from, and is pre prescribed within, the apparatus rather than from any notion of individual subjectivity. The studio here becomes a site where the pose and the look are themselves part of the apparatus. When we enter the studio we become in a sense interpellated by the apparatus, we become part of it and our position within it is to a large extent pre-determined. Williams' images picture the studio as a place in which subjectivity becomes elided in favour of object, commodity and technique. The idiomatic tropes of advertising and glamour imagery which engender this depleted subject are revealed as readily incorporated into a common conception of ways in which the studio functions.

We can relate this to the idea of the psychoanalytic frame discussed in our last chapter and how this might help in understanding how the process of transference might be understood in relation to the studio encounter. The frame, you will remember, is defined in psychoanalysis as the establishment of a set of rules, boundaries, environments that are all clearly defined prior to analysis and adhered to as it proceeds. This creates a space (temporal, physical, conceptual, contractual) within which the analysis can proceed in a controlled manner, providing an environment that is confidential and safe for the analysand. Any deviation from or resistance to the frame as the analysis proceeds can be viewed as evidence of transference. Mignon Nixon describes a kind of transference that relates directly to the frame itself, to the ideas, rules environments of psychoanalysis not so much as they are but as the analysand has imagined them to be (Nixon, 2005). It is

this kind of transference that we can envisage through William's photograph in that it seems to prefigure an already determined set of gestures, expressions and postures the tacit knowledge of which we not only recognise here but would undoubtedly carry with us into the studio ourselves.

The disconcerting obtuseness of William's practice seems to produce an effect of a vast and complex underlying photographic agenda, a structure that relates to the photographic apparatus and suggests that it is implicated at all levels. What is also suggested is that there is an autonomy to this apparatus that is both manipulative and invisible. Such ideas of course are impossible to represent in a direct manner, hence the apparent opaqueness of William's practice. Many of William's images appear at first encounter to be rather straightforward and might easily be mistaken for examples of the genres he appropriates. It is only with a more prolonged consideration that we realise it is not just the subject of the photographs or even the physical framed prints themselves that we are being shown it is a system that underpins the photographic itself. The effect of this is dizzying because it cannot be grasped at the level of the photograph and yet is implicated in every photograph we look at or will see in the future.

Commercial photographic practice

If through the critical practices of Stehli, Broomeberg and Chanarin and Williams we have furthered our theoretical understanding of the studio apparatus, we have yet to examine how this might be applied or even further understood in the context of actual commercial practice; and in particular the type of vernacular studio portraiture that forms

the focus of our investigation. If the emphasis of this chapter seems to have drifted somewhat, away from the domestic portrait and towards the world of fashion and advertising, then this reflects the focus of extant and useful photographic work on the studio. The examples I have chosen providing by far the most useful tools with which to examine our theoretical considerations and to see how these might become addressed by critical photographic practice. To conclude this chapter therefore I suggest that we consider two vernacular portrait practices both of which have the benefit of having been retrospectively discussed in theoretical terms. The vernacular studio portraits taken in the early to mid twentieth century by American photographer Mike Disfarmer have been rediscovered and theorised most notably by Jean Baudrillard and the equally domestic studio work of Indian photographer Suresh Punjabi has been recently salvaged and theorised by Christopher Pinney.

Mike Disfarmer

Mike Disfarmer (1884-1959) was an American portrait photographer who for fifty years operated from his own natural light studio in Heber Springs, Arkansas photographing the local townsfolk for ‘pennies a picture’ (Kasher, 2005). Disfarmer’s photographs of Arkansas farmers and their families are characterised by a directness that has been posthumously reappraised as not just a unique historical archive but as possessing qualities that seem to transcend or cut through the pragmatic and banal conventions of their genre. Unlike other studio photographers of the time Disfarmer did not employ props, scenery or theatrical poses in his photographs. His clients were usually photographed against a plain black or white cloth with, as Alan Trachtenberg notes, ‘no interference or intervention by any idea of how subjects of photographs should look’

(Trachtenberg, 2005). Disfarmer was at pains to isolate himself from his fellow townsfolk even changing his name to Disfarmer (meaning not a farmer) from Meyer (meaning poor farmer in German) claiming that he was blown into the town as an infant by a tornado. This deliberate act of disassociation more than hinted at an attitude of superiority and contempt for his towns folk whom he nonetheless photographed over five decades. This rather eccentric and contradictory attitude is perhaps at the heart of what makes Disfarmer's portraits unique in their 'breath-taking realism' employing a 'spontaneous, gestural reality' (Trachtenberg, 2005). Disfarmer made no attempt to pose his clients; they simply presented themselves to his camera in the space he provided.

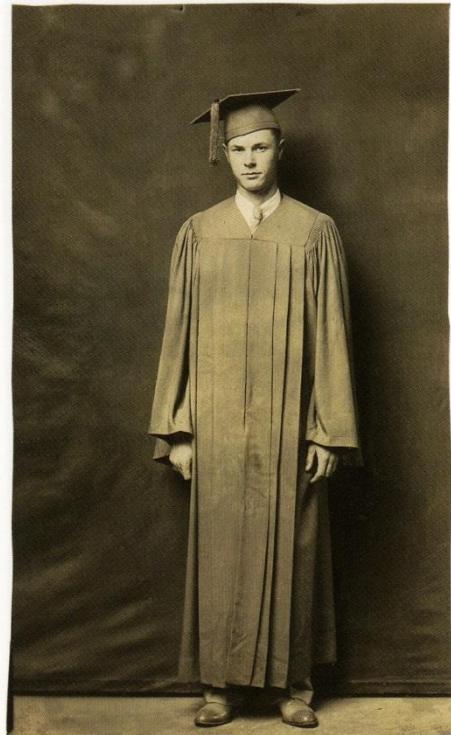
Alan Trachenberg notes that this space of Disfarmer's studio is an 'utterly vernacular place' a kind of 'anti-studio' because it remained a workplace (with the darkroom behind the camera) and made no pretensions to be a parlour or a stage on which to perform an idealised fiction. 'The design seems to have been to bring the subjects as flush with the discerning eye of the camera as possible, to overcome the distance of conventional poses and props in order to reveal a more essential, intransigent difference between the photographer's eye and its object' (Trachtenberg, 2005: 17). The disarming effect of this directness the apparent result of rancour and indifference rather than artistic endeavour or commercial ambition has been remarked upon by Jean Baudrillard as an illustration of 'the moment of the photograph' avoiding the what he calls the 'forced signification' that characterises all but a few photographs. (Baudrillard, 1999a: 148-9).

Baudrillard riles against photographers who 'plunder customs and cultures' calling them 'predators (who) will have colluded with their objects only to the extent of having infected them...with the image virus'. The only way to avoid this and to present people

'not in their sorrow and misfortune but in their destiny' is for the photographer to be 'both non-existent and one with the people he or she is photographing' and it is this condition that Baudrillard identifies in the portraits of Mike Disfarmer. (Baudrillard, 1999b). He observes that 'There is no pursuit of naturalness here but no idea of what they should look like either....They do not pity themselves and the image does not pity them' and what is revealed is 'not something moral or related to "objective" conditions but that which remains indecipherable within each of us: it is not of the order of reality but of the evil genius of reality, happy or otherwise. It shows that which is of the order of the inhuman within us, and it bears no witness to anything.' (Baudrillard, 1999a: 150) . Disfarmer's portraits for Baudrillard escape forced signification and reveal the 'minimal chance of an upsurge of otherness' (Baudrillard, 1999a: 148) just as the blind spot created by Holbein's anamorphous skull forces us to see the signification of 'The Ambassadors' and become suddenly aware of the delusional nature of our visual mastery and therefore aware of the gaze of the other.

What is useful here is that the studio appears in its most basic form stripped of all its conventional elements of artifice and grandeur. In a sense what Tratchenberg describes as an anti studio we could equally well call a pure studio because only the barest minimum and truly essential components are present. What is worth examining further is how this pure studio plays its part in the meaning that has been assigned to Disfarmer's images, if as Baudrillard seems to suggest Disfarmer's portraits foreground the real then what part does the studio play in this? Apparently free from the usual socially and culturally determined particularities that inevitably characterise the nature of studio space Disfarmer's portraits promise to offer up a particularly vital relationship between the apparatus and the subjects made visible within it.

Two portraits ca. 1940 (a young girl in a pale dress and a young male graduate)



Figures 8 and 9: Mike Disfarmer ca. 1940

These two single sepia toned portraits share the same economy of means which characterises Disfarmer's output. Both utilise a rather narrow portrait format of 3" x 5.5" which easily accommodates the full length of the subjects both of which are standing. A dark plain cloth or canvas backdrop fills the upper part of each frame, hanging down to floor level, its bottom edge being characterised by an enclosed baton which allows the backdrop to rest against a stone floor, forming a distinct division between the two. The horizontal divide between backdrop and floor runs parallel to the frame edge resulting in a flattened impression of space effectively consisting of two rectangular plains. The subjects help to give a sense of depth to this compressed space but both also stand straight and are positioned very close to the backdrop which adds to the overall

impression of flatness or lack of depth. The girl is standing facing the camera her hands hanging straight by her sides. She is approximately 8 years old wearing a pale dress that stops just above the knee. There are two decorative bow motifs on the dress one to the right of the hem and one on the neckline towards her left shoulder. What appears to be an actual bow is worn in her hair which is carefully styled. She wears white ankle socks and sensible lace up leather shoes which seem slightly out of keeping with the her otherwise very feminine appearance. Her heels appear very close if not touching the bottom edge of the backdrop and her feet are angled strangely to her left which gives her a rather awkward and uncomfortable demeanour. Although facing the lens her gaze seems to be directed slightly to her left and somewhere beyond the camera. Her expression is hard to read it is at once passive, detached and uncomfortable. The overall impression is one of self-conscious awkwardness, as if entering this space has caused her to become acutely aware of her own body and how it might appear. Nothing about her stance or expression seems relaxed or easy and Disfarmer who was renowned for directing neither pose nor expression in his clients (Trachtenberg, 2005: 19, Kasher, 2005: 5) appears to have simply recorded this girl as she chose to hold herself; uncertain and uncentred.

The young man is dressed in his graduation robe which hangs straight from the shoulders down, covering virtually his entire body save for his hands and feet. We can see he is wearing a white shirt and plain light coloured tie and his shoes are highly polished mid toned brogues. On his head he wears his mortar board at a slight angle with the tassel hanging down to the left of his face. His body is angled very slightly to his right although his face and feet are directly facing us. The disparity is not as apparent here as in the picture of the girl but it still creates an impression of awkwardness. The arms again

hang down and the expression is again blank and impassive. The gaze, here though, is more direct and the man's general demeanour appears more relaxed. The floor occupies less space in this image presumably in order to accommodate the increase in subject height. Like the girl he is standing very close to the backdrop which appears lighter here; its uneven cloth surface being more apparent. There is even an impression that the young man's back may be in contact with this cloth backdrop causing the visible stress lines on it to converge towards his position. This again adds to the claustrophobic feeling of the space which is further encouraged by the overwhelming presence of cloth, formed by the backdrop and robe, which in combination constitutes the majority of the image.

What seems common to these images is their sense of space. Both share a studio space that appears not only confined and restricted but basic and unadorned to an unusual degree. This economy of means is further reflected in an apparent absence of the conventional visual language of studio portraiture. Outsider art is brought to mind here where visual material becomes generated in genuine absence of a cogent awareness of cultural context or tradition. Without the traditional paraphernalia and with scant regard to tradition or convention Disfarmer has left us with images that present a particularly raw version of the studio portrait one that allows us to see especially clearly the relationship between the apparatus in its purest or most basic form and the bodies that become made visible within it. There is a strange sense in Disfarmer's portraits that the studio and the people he photographs are connected in a more immediate and fundamental way than we are used to encountering as if both are formed from the same Arkansas dust. It's not even as if the sitters in Disfarmer's portraits are particularly innocent or unaware of the camera in the way that Benjamin describes Adamson's Newhaven Fishwife, it seems more a straightforward lack of concern from both camps.

This is not to suggest that Disfarmer did not care about the quality of his photographs nor that the townsfolk of Heber Springs did not care about their appearance. It is more that Disfarmer and his patrons seemed to manage very effectively to carry on with their business without feeling any need for anything more sophisticated or elaborate. There is virtually no studio to speak of here but there is also no attempt to hide that it is a studio. There is no attempt to coerce or elicit a set response or gesture but equally no attempt to suppress these either. The sitters are left to directly engage with the space, with the camera, with the apparatus; a situation that Disfarmer has seen no reason to disguise, simply ensuring that they are in front of his backdrop and before his lens. Largely eschewed here is the conventionalized signification that marks what Alvani terms the symbolic order of the portrait where photographers endlessly replicate the iconic images displayed in their reception rooms.(Alvani, 1996: 68) Certainly Disfarmer has provided his clients with images that still function within this symbolic order of ‘the portrait as public self’ but he has done so with such economy that the forced signification that conventionally characterizes this function seems almost entirely absent. This absence of conventionalised signification leaves the materiality of the studio and the bodies positioned within it exposed, emphasising the uncanny qualities of the photographic apparatus to not just record and replicate but to somehow reveal what Baudrillard calls the ‘otherness of the object’.(Baudrillard, 1999a: 148) The implication here is that this otherness, which we can equate with the Lacanian real, is not something that uniquely resides within Disfarmer’s portraits or that it was somehow particularly apparent within his studio. It is more that the constant presence of the real is something that the photographic process is perhaps uniquely able to suggest and that the conventional uses within which it becomes mobilised serve to suppress this quality. The studio in this sense is a setting that is perhaps particularly resonant with this photographic relationship to the

real because it is built around and is part of the apparatus of photography itself. It is not therefore Disfarmer who shows us the real it is his failure to successfully employ the symbolic order that conventionally serves to mask it. In this conception the studio can be thought of as the scene of a constant struggle to suppress the real; the potential ‘upsurge of otherness’ (Baudrillard, 1999a: 148) that the photographic apparatus threatens to suggest being tamed and managed through the various practices of representation within which it is set to work. This struggle is of course conventionally rendered invisible through professional practices where production becomes dictated by client expectation and market forces resulting in the slick banality of much professional portraiture. There are many occasions when this does not happen however, usually when less adept professional photographers fail to effectively deploy the technical equipment or visual conventions effectively. The awkward images that result allowing, as Steve Edwards noted of certain carte de visite portraits: ‘ideology to flood in’ (Edwards, 2006: 251). Such photographs tend to be discussed either within a professional discourse in terms of how they might be improved in order to meet a required and unquestioned standard or in sociological terms as examples of their social, cultural and historical specificity. Occasionally however we encounter a professional practice that seems to encourage a deeper level of contemplation, one such practice as we have seen is that of Mike Disfarmer another is the portrait practice of Suresh Punjabi which has been re-presented and discussed by Christopher Pinney.

Suresh Punjabi

Pinney, an anthropologist and photographic historian, has formulated a thesis around the photographic studio which makes use of photographs by Suresh Punjabi, a commercial portrait photographer operating from Studio Suhag in Nagda, India (Pinney, 2014b, Pinney, 2012, Pinney, 2014a). It is these images, mostly dating from the 1970's and 1980's, and Pinney's discussions around them, that will form the conclusion to this chapter, not as may be supposed in order to account for the cultural differences that these reveal but rather to demonstrate the opposite. Photography, Pinney argues, is predominantly discussed in Western terms. When Indian or other non-Western photography is analysed it is usually in order to demonstrate its cultural significance as indicative of the particular region and peoples it serves. Pinney himself does this in much of his earlier writing on Indian photography (*Camera Indica* for example(Pinney, 1997)). In looking at the photographs from Studio Suhag⁵⁵ however Pinney argues that these can reveal a kind of essential and therefore universal truth about photography that transcends the more familiar ethnological, marginalised readings whilst at the same time re-establishing them. This re incorporation allows Pinney to formulate the idea of a 'world system photography' (Pinney, 2012, Pinney, 2014b: 17). He does this through a consideration of ideas proposed by Benjamin and Barthes that emphasise the singularity and contingency inherent in the photographic act, arguing that the Studio Suhag portraits not only embody these ideas but propose the photographic apparatus, and particularly here the studio apparatus, as central.(Pinney, 2012: 149)

⁵⁵ Pinney rescued thousands of negatives from the basement of Studio Suhag which had become flooded. Studio proprietor and photographer Suresh Punjabi asked Pinney who he had known for many years if he would be interested in this archive of images before it became completely destroyed through water damage. Many of the medium format black and white negatives retrieved by Pinney show evidence of this damage.

The photographs we are discussing as illustrative of Pinney's arguments need to be acknowledged as in some way co-authored by Pinney himself. This is because the images taken by Punjabi and subsequently salvaged and reproduced by Pinney are shown in a form which Punjabi would not have ever intended nor envisioned. A combination of factors; limitations of space, the demand for full length portraits, the fixed square format of the Yashica roll film camera has meant that often far more was captured on Punjabi's negatives than he actually required for his portraits. The full frame of the medium format black and white negatives are reproduced by Pinney revealing the 'visual noise' of the studio apparatus; visual noise that Punjabi would have cropped out as a matter of course when printing these images for his clients. The appearance of the apparatus in the periphery of Punjabi's images has, therefore, nothing to do with his own conception of how these images were to be received and yet at the same time everything to do with how the final image will appear. Pinney therefore affords us a privileged view of the output of a small commercial portrait studio one in which the apparatus is revealed and becomes visibly implicated in the construction of meaning.

Portrait of a young man ca.1980



Figure 10: Suresh Punjabi commercial portrait of a young man ca.1980

One such image, typical of Suresh Punjabi's portraits from Studio Suhag, pictures a young man in a standing pose, his right foot is placed on a strategically positioned chair and his upper body leans forward slightly his right arm resting nonchalantly on his raised right knee, his left hand placed on his hip. The pose might be described as self-consciously relaxed and deliberately masculine designed to create an impression of debonair macho coolness. This impression is furthered by the man's attire which appears similarly self-conscious and rather flamboyant; a white untucked shirt, open at the neck with rolled up sleeves and a high collar, white flared trousers and large dark sunglasses that obscure his eyes. A carefully coiffed hairstyle and moustache and an expensive looking watch complete the look which suggests Western influences and seems, at least

from this writer's Western 21st century perspective to date the image to the 1970's or early 1980's. What is beyond doubt is that we are witnessing a very deliberate pose to the camera, a pose that is both sincere and executed with conviction and this is reflected in the apparent sincerity of the photograph which in its original version would have functioned to promote an idealised impression, promoting social standing and aspirations. In this sense we are witnessing what might be described as a typical commercial portrait one that as we have seen is rooted in the visual traditions of the 'swagger portrait' (Pinney, 1997) of the 18th century and their subsequent appropriation by carte de visite photographers in the 19th century. Consistent with this reading is the appearance of the backdrop in this photograph which although rather basic clearly denotes the trappings of a palatial balcony or veranda complete with pillar, gathered curtains and decorative balustrade. It is not entirely clear whether this backdrop is painted directly onto the studio wall or is a cloth hanging from the ceiling, it meets the floor but does not extend onto it, so there is a clear division. The floor is partly covered by a traditional Indian rug on which the man's left foot and the front two legs of the chair rest. The backdrop appears to curve slightly to the left of the frame as if to disguise what might be an otherwise distinct corner. The impression is that the picture is taken towards this corner rather than facing the backdrop head on. As a consequence the man is positioned directly in front of a pillar clearly designed to form a feature to the left of the sitter, the remaining area to the right forming a featureless space. This apparently arbitrary positioning means that the bottom of the pillar appears between the man's legs, its top protrudes from his head a curtain spouts from his shoulder.

Our description so far has concentrated on those elements destined to be included in the final portrait but Pinney has reproduced Punjabi's negative in its original full frame

square format and we get to see not just the intended central scene but a host of peripheral information. To the right of our young man in flares we can see the more central part of the veranda backdrop its featureless surface consisting of the combination of an indistinct depiction of sky and a host of extra markings, scrapes and scratches, that we can assume to be the result of water damage to the negative. On the far right of the image we can see two studio lights; one only partly visible entering the frame at the top right corner and the other fully in view atop a short stand which rests on the carpet. Both lights are directed towards the man their illumination clearly evident as it spills onto the backdrop behind him. To the left of the frame we see the edge of the backdrop as it curves around the corner. This seems to suggest that the backdrop is not painted directly onto the wall because where it ends there is a gap, a dark space from which emerges another backdrop which populates the left fifth of the image. From what we can see this backdrop appears to depict a rural scene showing a wooden hut, a path, some trees and flying birds. The incongruous nature of this second scene together with its marginalised position indicates that it, almost certainly, would have been cropped out at the printing stage, as would, therefore, the lighting stand that runs parallel with the far left of the frame.

It is in relation to the following passage from Walter Benjamin's Little History of Photography that Pinney constructs his arguments.

'No matter how artful the photograph, no matter how carefully posed his subject, the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search a picture, for the tiny spark of contingency, of the here and now, with which reality has (so to speak) seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long forgotten moment the future

nests so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it' (Benjamin et al., 1999: 510, Pinney, 2012: 148)

For Pinney it is the intrusion of the photographic apparatus within the 'silent Brechtian margin' (Pinney, 2014a: 11) of the frame that serves to embody the contingency that Benjamin identifies. 'Surash Punjabi would doubtless have preferred 'clean' negatives without the clutter, but the materiality of his apparatus combined with the materiality of his studio inevitably 'seared' them with the noise of the pro filmic' (Pinney, 2012: 150). The profilmic for Pinney is the *event* that occurs in front of the camera which he contrasts with notions of truth or reality that are commonly invoked in discussions around photography. 'In a studio, this event is created by the ensemble of poses and accessories presented to the camera at the moment of exposure. It is marked by the particularity and specificity of what Barthes called the body (*corps*) whose singularity he contrasted with the generality of the *corpus*' (Pinney, 2014b, Barthes, 1993). Pinney makes the argument that the studio portrait, as exemplified in the Studio Suhag photographs, privileges the event over any attempt to capture reality. Pinney uses this as the basis for his argument for what he calls a 'world system photography' and allows him to demonstrate that Punjabis negatives in being particularly 'seared' by the profilmic (through the visual intrusion of the apparatus) can serve as examples of a universal constant of photography rather than purely localised cultural and ethnographic documents. Without wishing to undermine Pinney's considerable and laudable achievement here I do think it is worth revisiting the passage in Camera Lucida that Pinney cites. Pinney takes us tantalisingly close to a number of ideas circling around the studio apparatus and how this link to a supposed essence of photography but he hinges his thesis on two rather unstable and unsubstantiated assumptions; first, that the *corpus* that Barthes discusses is aligned with

notions of truth and second, that Barthes idea of event, that he describes as a sovereign contingency, can be equated with the staged event of the studio portrait. Pinney writes that ‘The camera records what is placed in front of it and on its own is incapable of making distinctions about the relationship of its visual trace to psychic, social or historical normativity.’ (Pinney, 2014b: 19) this much is certain but what becomes recorded in the studio I would argue has everything to do with the psychic, social and historical and cannot be successfully argued at the level of an event in Barthes’ terms. In order to demonstrate this it is necessary to quote Barthes at length.

‘The first thing I found was this. What the photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially. In the Photograph, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else: the photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see; it is the absolute particular, the sovereign contingency, matte and somehow stupid, the *This* (this photograph and not photography), in short what Lacan calls *tuché*, the occasion, the encounter, the real in its indefatigable impression.’ (Barthes, 1993: 4)

It seems clear that what Barthes means by the ‘corpus I need’ is all that is ‘external to the object, without relation to its essence’ (Barthes, 1993: 4) in other words all those empirical, rhetorical and aesthetic considerations which most often constitute the photographer’s intention. The ‘corpus I need’ is what is required by the photographer and what he strives to produce. As Barthes illustrates this would encompass all genres and practices; landscapes, portraits, objects, nudes whether photographed by professional or amateur with either pictorialist or realist agenda (Barthes, 1993: 4). The photographs produced by Studio Suhag in being professionally produced, within a historically and

socially established genre would seem to epitomise what Barthes describes. The staging of an event in these photographs is negotiated through a series social and cultural determinants in which professional practice and client expectation combine and operate in accordance with localised geographical, economic and ideological factors. By contrast the *event* that Barthes describes cannot be by definition orchestrated, controlled, negotiated because it is at a level of ‘a sovereign contingency’ of ‘the real’; in other words existing beyond symbolisation. This contingency, the body I see, the absolute particular, is what Punjabi and all other professional portrait photographers strive to ‘transcend for the sake of something else’ (Barthes, 1993: 4). The point here is that whilst I agree with Pinney’s argument that non western photographic practices are equally capable of demonstrating a universal constant I find it harder to accept that this constant occurs at a culturally determined level. This does not however negate the idea of Pinney’s world system photography but rather pitch, as Barthes suggests it at the level of the Lacanian real and, crucially for our purposes, suggested as somehow existing at the level of the apparatus. The apparatus that intrudes into Punjabi’s negatives point to the mechanics of photography ‘matte and somehow stupid’ its appearance both unintentional yet wholly necessary. This disturbs the cultural by showing it as constructed and controlled yet simultaneously contingent; the spark of the here and now being implicated within the apparatus itself and threatening to erupt in a Baudrillardian ‘upsurge of otherness’ (Baudrillard, 1999a: 148). We have noted how Disfarmer’s portraits have this effect through a negation or short circuiting of conventional authorship; the ‘bodies we see’ being depicted with disarming honesty. Punjabi’s portraits appear more contrived, more deliberately staged...in themselves they might be described as fairly typical of Indian studio portraiture from the 1970’s and 80’s. In Pinney’s re-presentation, however, the

presence of the apparatus frames Punjabi's staging and re-establishes it as an element of an otherwise purely photographic act.

The studio is revealed here in its contradictory aspect, one that we have argued as a cause of anxiety. The studio is a photographic apparatus and as such will always produce that 'sovereign contingency' which Barthes equates with the Lacanian Real (Barthes, 1993: 4). It is also in almost every case an apparatus that promises at a social and cultural level to suppress this contingency. This is of course true as Barthes reminds us of almost all genres of photographic practice but the photographic portrait studio becomes particularly characterised in this respect because it exists as an architecture where this occurs in relation to an idealised self-image. The propensity of the photographic image to stubbornly 'lead the corpus I need back to the body I see' (Barthes, 1993: 4) thus inevitably haunts the studio encounter and always maintains the potential to undermine our own imaginary relationship to our own image, itself a misrecognition that founds the ego. Consequently the studio is a space where the potential for an awareness of Lacan's *l'objet petit a* is particularly apparent and specifically located within the photographic apparatus.

We have seen how Lacan described the *l'objet petit a* in the visual domain as figured in terms of the Gaze but in another seminar from the same year, *Tuché and Automaton*, (Lacan, 1998) Lacan also provides a way to understand how *l'objet petit a* can become evident through the processes of transference and repetition. This not only provides a way of furthering our suggestion that transference is an inevitable constituent of the studio encounter it also gives a way of thinking of how the process of repetition as

a psychical phenomenon might be usefully considered analogous with commercial photographic portrait practices.

Lacan describes *tuché* as being ‘an encounter with the real’ distinguishing it from *automaton* which represents ‘the network of signifiers’ (Lacan, 1998: 52)⁵⁶ He notes “The real is beyond the automaton, the return, the coming back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle. The real is that which always lies behind the automaton...” (Lacan, 1998: 54) Lacan stresses the importance of the function of *tuché* for an understanding of repetition and transference. Repetition, the propensity to revisit or repeat the scene of trauma for no discernible reason, is famously illustrated by Freud in the game fort da that his grandson plays with a cotton reel, simulating for Freud the repeated disappearance of the mother (Freud, 2003a: 53). Lacan points out that the cotton reel is ‘not the mother reduced to a little ball by some magical game...it is a small part of the subject that detaches itself from him while still remaining his, still retained’... ‘the *petit a*’. (Lacan, 1998: 62) Repetition becomes manifest within the symbolic at the level of *automaton* in effect circling the Real. Transference also bears a relation to the real but at the level of the imaginary and is always ‘as relation to absence’ (Lacan, 1998: 54) the transference by nature being located and belonging elsewhere. Jacques Allan Miller summarises Lacan’s position: ‘In effect, repetition is the continued disappointment of the encounter with the *objet a*, whereas the transference presents this *objet a*. And therefore, underneath the disjunction between the two Freudian concepts of repetition and transference, Lacan discovers a more secrete conjunction, namely, that these two

⁵⁶ Lacan borrows the terms *tuché* and *automaton* from Aristotle who uses them in order to demonstrate their resistance to his theory of *Physics*.

concepts are both articulated to the object: repetition as missing it (it only misses it because it aims at it), and the transference as presenting it.(Miller, 2011).

Reclaiming the Barthes' Lacanian nuance to the contingency that sears Punjabi's negatives allows us to consider how the psychoanalytic reading of the studio encounter we posited in the last chapter might be seen to be manifest in commercial photographic practice. The anxiety associated with the studio encounter remarked upon by Benjamin and Barthes and established as a common phenomenon has been discussed in relation to a form of transference occurring outside of the analytic situation. The possible connection between this anxiety and a heightened awareness of the Lacanian gaze within the studio was posited and was further argued as possibly located within the photographic apparatus itself. If we consider Punjabi's studio Suhag portraits as being indicative of repetition, of revisiting and replaying a scene of potential trauma, and thereby circling the object (*automaton*) then we can consider Pinney's reclaimed and re-presented scans, with the apparatus made visible, as suggestive of the transference that might present that object (*tuché*). Both the transference and the apparatus by definition belong elsewhere, outside of the frame and yet both can be argued as fundamental to it. Pinney's agenda here, as with many of the art practices we have been examining, may not be drawing from psychoanalytic theory directly but, as we have observed, can still serve to enrich and inform our investigation in that direction. The realisation of a practice that primarily does do this, along with an adequate methodological account, will form the remainder of our investigation.

Chapter Four

Reflections on Practice

Introduction

In this chapter I will introduce, describe and reflect upon the practice element of the research project. My intention here is to give an insight into the ideas, intent and processes that have gone into the making of this work. It will also provide some conjecture on how this practice relates to the theoretical concepts engaged within this thesis and help to contextualise it in relation to the practices that we have been examining.

As we have seen, extant critical photographic practices have engaged the space of the studio in relation to various power relations casting it as the site of a gendered gaze, a quintessential landscape of commodity capitalism and part of an insidious and all pervasive photographic apparatus. The majority of commercial studio practice continues to play out these power relations whilst very occasionally spawning work that appears to transcend its pragmatic purpose and that attracts philosophical attention. This attention on commercial practice, notably from Benjamin, Barthes, Baudrillard and Burgin frequently alludes to a psychic dimension calling on Freudian and Lacanian concepts in support of their arguments. Whilst there is a tradition of critical practices that engage these notions through the appropriation of existing studio portraits⁵⁷ there is a distinct paucity of work that seeks to interrogate the studio itself as what might be termed a mise-

⁵⁷ John Stezaker, Julie Cockburn et al

en-scene of desire; a space that bears a particular relation to the desiring subject who becomes positioned within it. Through our investigation so far we have tried to make links between the physical apparatus of the studio and this psychic dimension suggesting that the studio is not simply a space in which certain subject/object power relations get played out but that these can be seen as symptomatic of an ambivalence that is built into the studio space itself. The studio space in these terms embodies a number of contradictions being simultaneously a discursively constituted ideological machine for the production of a symbolic representation of the self and a site where the threat of a traumatic eruption of the real is constantly suggested through the apparatus of which the studio itself forms a part. It is within the context of an ongoing consideration of such ideas that I have undertaken the practice element of this research.

Overview

The practice has from the outset been developed as a body of work that can be exhibited and received in a way that is effectively independent of this thesis. As such it situates itself within a context of contemporary photographic practice and is thus designed in order to communicate to, and be appreciated by, a visually literate audience – one that is largely aware of this context and the debates that surround it.

As a part of this research project it also, necessarily, bears a close relationship to the arguments made within this thesis. This relationship can be thought of as being in the form of a dialogue where the research as a whole proceeds through a combination of complex interactions between the two. Both are simultaneously integral and yet

independent. It is important therefore to avoid an impression that the practice somehow forms an illustrative or didactic function, of use only within the context of reading the thesis. It is equally important to avoid the idea that the thesis exists in order to anchor potential meaning within the practice or to simply explain it. There is thus good reason for proceeding with caution in any attempt to reflect upon the practice directly within the thesis as I am about to do here. The danger is that I give the impression that there is a definitive way of reading the practice, one that might serve to close down other potential meanings and thus diminish its effectiveness as an autonomous art practice.

However it is also the case that I have given a great deal of thought to the way that certain themes have become suggested through the practice and how these might be directly useful to the written arguments. Whilst the making of the work has been largely undertaken with a deliberate avoidance of what I would describe as a theoretical approach the subsequent analysis, of what appears to make the work effective within this research context, has generated considerations and associations with theory that I feel both further and deepen these arguments. I have therefore included some of these readings in this chapter as a way to share how I choose to analyse my own work and to demonstrate how such analysis has acted as a kind of stepping stone to certain theoretical considerations that don't simply reiterate the arguments I have made in previous chapters but help to underpin and further them. I have chosen to reflect upon the development of the practice in a chronological manner and this is punctuated with these readings which appear inset in italics.

In retrospect the practice can be collectively defined as eclectic; comprising 13 distinct components, each the realisation of a different strategy. This varied approach was not

something that I set out to produce, in fact for a long time I struggled to find a singular method, one that might prove effective and consistent. In order to provide an understanding of how and why I came to produce a body of work so at odds with my initial intentions I will describe and reflect upon the thinking, intent and processes that have gone into its development from the outset.

Reflection

As a precursor to this research I had produced a body of work called *Cachet*, whilst working in a high street portrait studio. This work showed a variety of studio backdrops in abstraction, in such a way that their surface markings and designs appeared to take on a significance beyond their ostensible function (Figs.1-2).



Figure1: *Untitled* from the series *Cachet* (2011)



Figure 2: *Untitled* from the series *Cachet* (2011)

For a long time I became stuck with this work, determined to incorporate it, yet unable to find other ways of picturing the studio that seemed as effective. Consequently a lot of the work I produced early in this research has fallen by the wayside, failed attempts to find a new approach. Many months were spent visiting studios attempting a variety of strategies ranging from an objective typology of studio spaces to a more subjective documentary approach, encountering the studio as a kind of landscape for my own self-consciously formalist photographic compositions. I also attempted a more playful and conceptual strategy, commissioning studio photographers to take my portrait whilst I reciprocated by making a simultaneous exposure. The resulting series of diptychs (titled *Likeness*) whilst effective in demonstrating a range of commercial portrait aesthetics and encouraging a certain conceptual consideration of photographic capture appeared rather contrived (Figs. 3-4) and failed to highlight the studio space as I had hoped.



Figure 3: *Untitled* from the unused series *Likeness* (2012)



Figure 4: *Untitled* from the unused series *Likeness* (2012)

In spite of my frustrations at this point I believe that these early experiments were particularly useful as empirical research. They allowed me access to studios and photographers as well as giving me valuable experience of being the subject of studio photographs. It seems ironic then, that my initial breakthrough came not from these sustained and elaborate excursions but from an image that had been saved on my computer for some time. Whilst working on the *Cachet* series I had begun to collect existing studio images from various sources with the intention of creating another related series of work. This would involve the digital removal of subjects from appropriated studio portraits leaving only the spaces or backdrops. The process was time consuming and not always successful and the resulting images although intriguing lacked the immediacy of the *Cachet* work whilst also appearing too similar (Fig.5).



Figure 5: appropriated portrait with subject removed (2011)

One image in particular, a studio photograph of a young debutant, dating from the 1950's, had proved extremely difficult in this respect, partly because it included both the floor and backdrop which met in a distinct line towards the bottom of the photograph. My frustrations in attempting to convincingly remove the subject from this image caused

me to try a far more basic intervention. Almost as a petulant acknowledgement of defeat I simply obscured the whole figure with a large rectangular black shape and pressed save. It was my rediscovery of this work, at a time when I was desperate to find an effective practice strategy, which made me realise the potential value of this image, an image that all at once seemed to propose certain qualities to the studio space, qualities that had thus far eluded me.

Having realised the potential in this image I reopened the Photoshop file and produced another version of the same photograph this time keeping the subjects body but obscuring her face with a black circle. I printed both, but even at this stage I believed these to be simply an indication of the qualities I was seeking rather than as a component of the practice itself (Fig. 6). So although this was the first element in the final body of work it took until the work in progress was exhibited at the point of transfer that I fully accepted it as a genuine part of my practice. I think that I believed the work to be weak, simply because the interventions I had made seemed so easy and were more or less spontaneous. The image too was not my own and although appropriation played a large part in my ongoing practice I had not really envisaged this as becoming a significant aspect of this research. Looking back I can see that my realisation that this image and the resulting diptych held the potential to propose a variety of themes and in a way set the scene for much of the subsequent practice strategies. Having fully accepted its place within the practice I began to see this piece as an introduction to the developing research in that it incorporates many of the themes and motifs that go on to characterise the final body of work and the theoretical writing. As a way of illustrating this I would like to share a brief retrospective analysis of this piece written at the transfer stage.



Figure 6: *Untitled* two framed pigment prints 14"x11" 2012

Analysis

My decision to obscure parts of the image seems to function in a number of ways and differently in each image. In the left hand print the black disc acts as a mask obscuring the model's face. This effectively robs the image of its ostensive function, transforming it from a portrait of a particular individual into something more generic. What becomes emphasised through the denial of any central identity is the structuring of the portrait; its framework. In other words the conventions of studio portraiture; those of setting, framing and pose and the conventions of dress, have become the subject of the image rather than this or that individual.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ The era that this photograph comes from, most probably the early 1950's, is something that John Stezaker describes as somehow ideal for this type of appropriation.....pictures from this period seem to embrace modern conceptions of glamour and style with a kind of innocence, personal identity appears as fully invested in these without any sense of irony. The effect is, as Stezaker puts it, 'of a commodity clothed in a dream....the repressed nature of the dream being revealed only later in appearing as anachronistic.' (reference taken from a talk by John Stezaker at Brighton University 1st May 2013) The idea that something has been repressed here is useful; suggesting that there are inherent yet latent properties that might be drawn out or revealed. The interventions made through the introduction of the black shapes invite contemplation of the space, the model and the print in various ways mobilising each of them as potential sites for such latent repressed properties.

The mask thus functions here as a device which hides, but in doing so also serves to reveal. Elias Canetti suggests that through the mask's ability to simultaneously conceal and express, its overriding effect is to separate. 'The mask fascinates and at the same time enforces distance' (Canetti, 1981: 375-6). It is clear that a kind of distance is forced here, separating the discursive from the subjective, but there is also another dimension which becomes suggested by the blackness of the mask itself.

The mask fascinates in this instance not because it replaces one identity with another but because it can also be read as an opening or hole in the image.⁵⁹ The positioning of this opening, over the face of the subject, replaces identity with a dark void. This lends the image an allegorical or metaphorical dimension; one that alludes to interiority. The suggestion of the presence of the unconscious mind through the picturing of a gap, space or void in place of the face has become a relatively common artistic trope. It has precedents in the rediscovered portraits by Ernst Belloque, the inked out portraits of Rodchenko and also in surrealist painting, perhaps most notably those by Magritte. It has also become adopted within the more recent postmodern practices of, amongst others, John Baldessari, Christian Boltanski, John Stezaker and Julie Cockburn. My own use of this device here in its rather perfunctory and blunt application I consider as closer to Baldessari's colourful masking discs than to Stezaker's collaged caves or Cockburn's ripped or covered surfaces.

The black rectangular shape in the right hand image obscures the figure completely. We are left with the setting and the shape which seems to sit inside the depicted space, replacing the ostensible subject of the photograph with a black monolith reminiscent of those that feature in

⁵⁹ David Campany describes how in many of John Stezaker's collages 'the black expanse oscillates between appearing as a solid and a void, flatness and three dimensionality' (Campany, 2011: 57)

Stanley Kubrik's 2001: A Space Odyssey⁶⁰. The ideological, psychic and material associations that the left hand image has encouraged are still in play when we observe this photograph but here all these relationships are reduced to one in which the setting becomes privileged through the obliteration of everything else. That such minimal intervention can effectively propose the studio space as both discursively prescribed and psychically determined suggests these as fundamental to its constitution.

Having recognised the effectiveness of such a simple negation of identity in foregrounding both the space and coding of the studio portrait I began to explore this in a variety of ways. In particular I wanted to see if I could incorporate this visual strategy within the studio itself rather than through the manipulation appropriated imagery. As I have discussed already, at this point I considered each of my experiments as an attempt to find a singular way of working. Only later did I start to realise that a combination of imagery from these seemingly diverse approaches might in themselves hold the potential to constitute a coherent body of work.

Up to this point I had only photographed studios as spaces, that is, not in use. In order to somehow incorporate an obscuring of identity within the studio I needed to have a subject. I decided to arrange to a studio portrait session using people I knew, and felt comfortable with, in a studio that was well equipped and large. My intention was to try out a number of different things during this session. One was a first attempt at having myself photographed whilst I simultaneously photographed the photographer, the first in

⁶⁰ The monolith appears in Kubrik's film several times serving as a structural linking device whilst remaining unexplained and enigmatic. The monolith appears to represent an unseen and unknown structuring intelligence whilst its blankness allows it to avoid definitive readings and instead encourage the projection of subjective meaning onto it.

my *Likeness* series. Another was to simply document a portrait session in progress without intervening. A third was to take on the role of the portrait photographer; that is, simply taking the portraits myself. The first two of these proved very fruitful providing very different results that each led to a series of work, although the first series (*Likeness*) was ultimately dropped. The third was less successful but was useful nonetheless for being the first time that I had taken studio portraits within a research, rather than a commercial, context.

The images from this session that ultimately proved most successful were the ones in which I acted as a passive observer documenting the portrait session in progress. To do this successfully I needed to use a handheld digital SLR with a fast lens and a high enough ISO setting to enable me to capture images in the relative darkness of the studio. My camera unlike the portrait photographer's was not tethered to the flash heads so I was relying on the modelling lights for my exposures rather than the flash. The size of the studio allowed me to move around quite freely behind the photographer and the lights, and it was this combination of factors that provided the perfect opportunity to replicate the obscuring strategies I had been applying to existing portraits (Figs. 7-9).





Figures 7-9: Unused images from documented portrait session (2012)

Because the modelling lights only fell onto the subject, the photographic apparatus, including the photographer, remained unlit and if incorporated within my photographs became silhouetted if I exposed for the modelling light alone. This was hugely exciting because I found I could use the black shapes formed by the photographic equipment and photographer as compositional elements and this was exactly what I needed in order to achieve the effect I was after. I produced a series of six images from this session and one of these became incorporated into the final body of work (Fig.10).



Figure 10: *Untitled* framed pigment print 20"x16" 2012

The apparent holding of the subject by the photographer in this image is in fact an illusion, an effect of photography's tendency to compress distance, but this only serves to heighten the sense that in the studio encounter there are forces and power relations at play that are not directly expressed or realised by the subjects within the studio space.⁶¹ Whilst this image does not seek to illustrate theoretical ideas it nonetheless effectively proposes that the studio space incorporates a constraining or coercive agenda.

⁶¹ The silhouette of the apparently controlling photographer recalls an essay by Stephen Edwards titled *The Machine's Dialogue*. Edwards uses the concepts of Dialogue and Monologue theorised by the Bakhtin School, a group of Russian theorists who formulated a radical and pioneering theory of discourse during the 1920's. 'The dialogical model of language presupposes that we orientate upon the others word, we incorporate it into our utterance which only takes place in relation to it. Within this perspective no utterance can ever be complete being only part of what has come before and what will follow....In opposition to this Bakhtin introduces the notion of monologue..[an] utterance to which we are unable to formulate a reply' Edwards argues that 'the studio constitutes a monological site; for the photographer it operates as a space in which to assert mastery over the object of fascination, for repressing the uncontrolled, the accidental and the contradictory.' Edwards makes use of this theory however in order to propose a third term Heteroglossia that allows for the contradictions of language that prevents monologism from ever being complete whilst still remaining stable. In the context of the studio Edwards sites the example of the Victorian bourgeois portrait as 'the exception that demonstrates the studios monologic rule' particularly that of the bourgeois child which presented the photographer with the impossible task of imposing control on the child whilst negotiating with the parent who would inevitably be present. Here the lines of authority were not so clearly demarcated...'the photographer was here playing out fantasies that were not strictly his or her own' (Edwards, 1990)

Analysis

The picturing of the subject as positioned and enclosed within a space that is formed by the photographic apparatus suggests that subjectivity, in being mediated through photography in this way, is somehow being surrendered to an apparatus; shaped into a form dictated less in terms of the individual and more in terms of the inscription of a social identity. This suggests what Foucault describes as a ‘positivity’ subsequently summarized by Agamben as the historical element of something loaded as it is with rules, rites and institutions that although imposed on the individual from outside becomes internalised in the systems of beliefs and feelings (Agamben, 2009: 4).

Such things were not in my head when I made this image but I was tacitly aware that what I was attempting to achieve in the moment had significance and a certain power....it took the subsequent writing of this thesis to begin to articulate these feelings in terms of a theoretical position.

The success of this series was compromised only by the means of digital capture that was required. The resulting prints whilst acceptable did not bare up to close scrutiny and would not allow for large reproductions, the high ISO setting required having produced an inevitable amount of digital noise. This added to a growing concern that the results I was achieving whilst using a digital camera even in the most ideal conditions were not producing the qualities that I was hoping to achieve. This was also highlighted by the black and white images I was shooting on medium format film as part of the *Likeness* series (right hand images in Figs.3-4). These appeared to have both a sense of immediacy and a strangeness that I felt encouraged a sense of heightened significance to the objects and spaces that they depicted. It was these sort of qualities that I had been hoping to

achieve from the outset and it was this realisation that caused me to seek out a new way of working at this point; a decisive turning away from digital capture and an acceptance that perhaps I could only achieve the results I was hoping for through the use of analogue film. At this point too I attended a talk by photographer Clare Strand whose work I had admired for some time. I arranged to meet with Clare and asked her how she achieved the qualities in her work, the exact kind of qualities that I had now identified as being relevant to my enquiry. Clare was very forthcoming and told me the type of film camera she uses and how she prints her photographs. Following this meeting I set about obtaining a similar camera and shot my next images with it (Figs. 11 and 12)

These were in many ways an attempt to refine and improve on the themes around the apparatus that we have been discussing. There were crucial differences though. I was using black and white film (partly through the influence of Clare Strand and partly as a way to quickly and cheaply test my new camera and how it might synchronise with the flash heads I was using.). For this sitting I borrowed a smaller studio and tried to replicate the masking qualities from the earlier shoot but this time as the portrait photographer rather than as an observer. This meant that the images had to be carefully staged rather than snatched at opportune moments. The camera was still hand held but the illumination was provided exclusively by the studio flash which meant I had to position myself behind the light source in order for it to simultaneously obscure and illuminate the subject. I found that this was most effectively achieved against a black backdrop which also provided an added dimension of depth. In the picture below (Fig.11) this impression of deep space is both asserted by the overall blackness of the image and undercut by the inclusion of the edges and upright supports of the black backdrop paper.



Figure 11: *Untitled* framed pigment print 24"x16" 2012

This was another productive shoot. I was beginning to feel that the space of the studio could become usefully explored through interventions and experiments that were playful. I think that my initial quest for a singular approach stemmed more from my preconceptions of what I believed to be appropriate for a PhD and what I believed would be expected of me at Brighton, than from my own practice. The realisation that my earlier appropriated pieces and these more experimental and conceptual studio experiments might actually be producing something of value marked the beginning of a new phase of production. It was at this point too that I began to get a sense of the practice as taking the form of a combination of different approaches and techniques and a belief that these could be presented together and still appear as part of one coherent body of work. This playfulness is perhaps best illustrate by the second piece of work produced during this portrait session (Fig. 12).

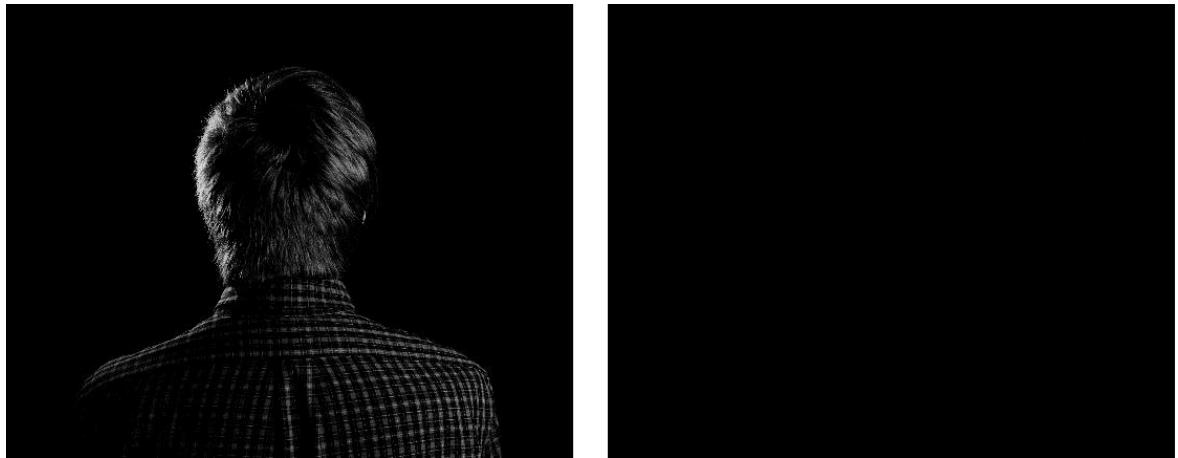


Figure 12: *Untitled* two framed pigment prints 14"x11" 2012

I wanted to give an exaggerated impression of the depth that the blackness figured in certain studio portraits implies. By turning my subject to face the black backdrop I intended to encourage the idea of a *Rückenfigur*; as if he is gazing into an unfathomable and infinite dark space. One exposure was made with the subject in this position and a second identical exposure was made without him there at all. I knew that if I did this that I would be able to present an image (one half of this diptych) that was simultaneously a picture of this imagined depth and also a simple recreation of the surface of the black paper that had created it thus complicating the studio space and its relation to the subjects that become positioned within it.⁶² Taking this further, and suggesting how this might open up theoretical ideas, it can be considered in Lacanian terms as picturing both the screening off of the real in terms of its function within the symbolic and the imaginary realms but also alluding to the real itself as a void, something ultimately unknowable and beyond symbolisation.

⁶² In producing this effect of screening but also giving an illusion of depth the black shapes can be viewed as metonymic with the studio itself. It can be usefully considered that this blackness is deployed as a reoccurring rhetorical device; a kind of leitmotif or idee fixe appearing in varying forms and to various degrees throughout this body of work.

The prints that I produced from this shoot were very pleasing. For the first time I felt that the materials I was using were rewarding my efforts. There were qualities in the way that objects and figures were rendered that I was simply not achieving through using a digital camera. There was a sense of solidity and clarity that I had achieved with the use of this newly acquired medium format camera and film that somehow gave the work credence, validity and an increased sense of significance. It was this realisation that prompted me to consider shooting some of my work on a larger 5x4 camera which I set about acquiring. I didn't yet know how exactly I would use this but I was fairly confident that the qualities it would allow me to achieve would prove invaluable. My earliest tests with this large format camera are shown below reflecting my then current interest in depicting figures gazing into a dark space (Figs. 13-14). It took a little while though for me to find a way to use the larger format to its full advantage which I will come to shortly.





Figures 13-14: Initial experiments with 5x4 camera (2013)

In the meantime, alongside the studio shoots, I was continuing my ongoing experimentation with various appropriated imagery. One of these experiments used school photographs, again with the initial intention of removing the subject from the pictured space leaving just the cloudy backdrop. My eldest son, Joseph, had been creating a template for a school photographer whom I knew from my work as a printer. In one of the earliest templates that Joseph had mocked up he had blacked out the figures of the children and I was struck by the way he had achieved this and the particular affect that it produced. I replicated this effect on the figures I was trying to remove and produced a series of images. (Figs. 15-16 and Fig. 17)





Figures 15-16: Unused images depicting unlit figures of children (2012)

What struck me about Joseph's mock up and what I tried to maximise in my own versions was the sense in which the figures of the children appeared less blacked out in Photoshop and more simply unlit within the space. This was achieved through a careful attention to the edges of the figures and particularly their hair. If these edges maintained the impression of being lit as if just caught by the light hitting the backdrop then the effect of a genuine absence of light within the space was created. It seemed genuine enough to be believable yet at the same time difficult to imagine how it might have been so effectively realised. The most profound effect however was the realisation that once I had blacked out the figures successfully in this way they no longer appeared to be facing forwards but seemed to be gazing back towards the cloudy backdrop that was behind them. This backdrop now seemed to take on the aspect of a vast, almost sublime, space and I found that I could maximise this effect through increasing the brightness of the backdrop within the image. The associations with Ruckenfigurs are again suggested here perhaps more so because the cloudy backdrop seems to recall the sublime vistas figured in Romantic landscape painting (Casper David Friedrich's painting *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, 1818 being the most famous), where figures gaze back into the distance. The studio backdrop appeared to recall the traditions of painting from which it has evolved

and the images seemed to figure the absurdity of viewing the school photographer's backdrop as capable of evoking the sublime. The work thus alludes to some kind of deep reflective state and the conventionalized space becomes reconfigured as a psychic space. This analogy becomes reinforced by the inherent ambivalence that characterises the photographic backdrop, which serves to both mask depth whilst at the same time suggesting it. A very simple intervention had again produced work that seemed to invite an opening up to theoretical conjecture. Some of my own personal musings in this respect are recounted in the following analysis.



Figure 17: *Untitled* Two framed pigment prints 14"x11" 2012

Analysis

The reimagining of the backdrop here as a kind of vast unfathomable space can be considered as both symbolic and metonymic with what Lacan calls 'the screen' (Lacan, 1998: 107). For Lacan the human subject being a desiring subject 'is not, unlike the animal, entirely caught up in [t]his imaginary capture' (Lacan, 1998: 107). In other words the human subject although

unable to conceive or articulate what lies beyond the imaginary and the symbolic is nonetheless capable of experiencing an awareness of what Lacan terms the gaze. Beyond appearance there is nothing in itself, there is the gaze' (Lacan, 1998: 103) This gaze becomes elided in the 'illusion of the consciousness of seeing oneself seeing oneself' (Lacan, 1998: 83) and Lacan asks 'If then the gaze is that underside of consciousness how shall we try to imagine it?' (Lacan, 1998: 83)

The gaze can only be suggested it can never be grasped because it is 'nothing in itself' it is in other words a void, an absence and a lack in the most profound sense. Lacan proposes that a picture is capable of suggesting this lack and that this represents mans' ability to 'isolate the function of the screen and play[s] with it....Man in effect knows how to play with the mask beyond which there is the gaze. The screen here is the locus of mediation'.(Lacan, 1998: 107)

The picture for Lacan will always figure an absence more clearly than perception because it necessitates a central viewing position; a central field. In every picture this central field cannot but be absent, and replaced by a hole – a reflection, in short, of the pupil behind which is situated the gaze. Consequently, and in as much as the picture enters into a relation to desire, the place of the screen is always marked, which is precisely that by which, in front of the picture, I am elided as subject of the geometrical plane'. (Lacan, 1998: 108)⁶³ These photographs appear to picture absence through their darkened subjects and seem to reflect our own absence in their centrality and an apparent alignment with our own viewing orientation. The consequent hierarchical inversion in the image proposes an uncertain relationship with the screen through its metaphoric symbolisation in the form of the studio backdrop. The quintessentially symbolic and rather mundane nature of this studio backdrop here becomes somehow uncanny, both hinting at

⁶³ This is strongly suggested in different way in Jeff Wall's image Picture for Women which proposes the absent viewpoint through the central presence of a large format camera; its open lens facing out towards the viewer. David Campany describes '...the black trap of that aperture, engorging and disgorging what we think we see' as an example of an incorporation of a blind spot the presence of which functions metaphorically 'as a sign of the always partial and incomplete nature of vision itself.'(Campany, 2011: 53).

something that evades consciousness, through its function as a screen, whilst presenting an illusory sense of space that is itself suggestive of a vast and unfathomable elsewhere.

Once I had accepted that my practice might comprise diverse elements it started to become apparent that whilst certain aspects of the studio were being emphasised others were less well represented. I was yet, for example, to make images that might usefully convey the physical space of the studio. My earlier attempt at producing a typology of studio spaces was not only disappointing it was also an approach that would not easily integrate with the varied portfolio I was developing. I needed to find an approach that might convey the architecture and spaces of the studio in a condensed form. The sense of a body of work that served to propose a variety of considerations around a single object of enquiry through a diverse and eclectic collection of images was beginning to come together as an overall methodology. I began to think of how a single image might be capable of functioning within this body of work as serving to propose a particular aspect of the enquiry as a whole. Once this was accepted each image that was chosen to form a part of this body of work took on a much greater importance. It also became apparent that certain elements or motifs seemed to be common to works that were otherwise unrelated in approach and intended outcome. It was with these newly emerging realisations in mind that I decided to visit a studio which I had been told about some months before. Reeves studio in Lewes is one of the oldest working studios in the world having been established in 1851.

What struck me about this studio was that it seemed to incorporate the whole history of studio portrait photography in one space. Not in the manner of a museum display or

recreation but simply through a combined effect of continuous functioning and family tradition; the studio having been run by the Reeves family for four generations. The back of the studio was filled with equipment and props from all eras spanning the entire history of photography (Fig. 18). Some of these such as the head supports, used in the earliest days of the medium, were clearly not likely to be used today but there was still a sense that they were there waiting just in case; the current photographer Tom being unable to discard things that his father or grandfather would have used. Similarly the front of the studio appeared virtually unchanged from how it must have looked in the 1900's, being wood panelled and still lit by daylight via a large panel of windows and a glass roof. Yet the portraits being made here were in a contemporary mode much like the Venture portraits described in Chapter 1. Consequently a white roll of backdrop paper and studio flash equipment were in use at the front of the studio contributing to the overall anachronistic effect.



Figure 18: view of the back of Reeves Studio in Lewes (2013)

My first visit to Reeves studio was in order to ascertain how useful the space was and whether I would be permitted to take photographs there. Both proved affirmative. I

made some digital test images of the space and arranged to return some weeks later with a large format camera. There was one particular arrangement of objects however that I decided to photograph, there and then on this first visit, using the 6x9 film camera that I had brought along. The arrangement in question comprised a painted panel depicting a cloudy sky (presumably intended as a backdrop), a red curtain and an antique camera stand (Fig.19). There was something about this scene in the way these elements related to each other that resonated with the considerations of the studio as a psychic space that I had begun to consider in the thesis. It also incorporated the potential to expand upon and possibly replace the *Cachet* imagery (Figs. 1-2) which at this stage I still considered a potential component of the practice.



Figure 19: *Untitled* framed pigment print 36"x24" 2013

The scene I captured on film did indeed go on to form a part of the practice and it did allow me to let go of the *Cachet* images. It also in retrospect reflects a definite realisation that the images I was capturing on film were far more likely to produce the results that I was hoping to achieve than digital which from this point becomes largely employed in the production of test shots. The way that I decided to photograph this scene is also

worthy of note here. Almost all of the other images in my final body of work adopt a centralised, square on aesthetic that seems to suggest a detached and objective gaze. This image however is explicitly more authored in its formal arrangement. I was aware of this when I took the shot; that I was using a technique that belonged more to my practice from the 1980's. My work from this time drew from the American snapshot aesthetic of William Egglestone and Lee Friedlander more than the cool detachment of the Dusseldorf School or the appropriated mundane aesthetic that became used in conceptual art practice that I know tended to adopt. This approach exploited the potential to transform an encountered scene from its mundane or ordinary existence into an image that transcended both the snapshot aesthetic used and the scene itself often imbuing it with a heightened sense of significance or poetic resonance. Such an aesthetic approach I had judged as largely unsuitable for this project, it seemed to announce my own agency as photographer in a way that was distracting from the object of enquiry. Here however such an approach seemed appropriate and in retrospect I think that this is because I needed to assert an exaggerated sense of significance and perhaps even a sense of menace on the scene I had encountered and the dark gap that it presented. The way that I have come to view this in relation to some of the arguments I have made in this thesis is summarised in this short analysis:

Analysis

The painted backdrop in this photograph is revealed as a screen by showing its edge, but what it screens is simply another screen formed by the curtain that extends behind it. The gap opening between them appears not so much as an opening onto reality but more to a beyond that can only

exist by virtue of the screens that mask it.⁶⁴ Within the context of this research the image seems to extend some of the themes we have been discussing, resituating them at the level of the apparatus as it exists outside of the diegetic space of the studio portrait. It proposes that we consider the studio apparatus not only in terms of its symbolic function, masking the lack on which subjectivity is founded, but also as a site where a sense of this lack might become suggested.

My decision to use a 5x4 camera to document the front of Reeves studio was helped by my digital test shots. These confirmed my hope that the condensed sense of history that this space seemed to embody and the countless anachronisms that it incorporated were most effectively conveyed in a straightforward objective manner. In fact the surreal qualities of this space seemed enhanced through the adoption of an all-inclusive, democratising, objective, frontal and dispassionate address and diluted through any further attempts at picking out individual anachronisms and details or through evidencing my own authorship by the adoption of aesthetic and formal framing. My hope was that by using 5x4 colour film, thereby maximizing clarity and emphasizing stillness, I might achieve in one or two images what I had failed to do I through a typology of many: to picture a single studio that might not only be thought of as embodying a sense of the studio in general terms but that might also, in its strange

⁶⁴ The picturing of space here brings to mind Leibniz's model of the Baroque house which Deleuze uses to illustrate his concept of the fold. Deleuze describes the lower level of the Baroque house as consisting of surfaces that fold into one another in the nature of 'origami'. Less a collection of 'independent points' and more akin to 'a piece of fabric or a sheet of paper which divides into an infinite number of folds or disintegrates into curved movements....Always a fold within the fold, like a cavern within the cavern.' (Deleuze and Strauss: 231) This is Deleuze's analogy for the world of matter that exists as exterior, existing in terms of subjectivity: outside. Contrasting this is a dark upper chamber in the Baroque house that has no windows or openings 'sightless but in return resonant' with the floor below. This for Deleuze is analogous with subjective interiority or the soul or spirit. The two are both separate yet resonate, themselves folded together in the model of the Baroque house; the exterior as façade folded back into the darkened room of the soul.

arrangement, be able to trigger other useful associations. My return to Reeves studio did indeed result in such an image but not entirely as I had expected since in anticipation of my second visit Tom had unearthed and installed an old backdrop that had been used by his grandfather. I was initially worried that this might seem too contrived or appear like an historical recreation, but the striking effect of this black and white backdrop within the space seemed to outweigh these concerns and I decided to record the scene with this in place. I took great care setting up the 5x4 camera in an attempt to photograph the front of the studio as square on and centrally as possible (Fig. 20). I wanted to adopt a position and a distance that would allow the diegetic space of the traditional portrait to be pictured in the centre of the image but allowing the peripheral noise of the studio around it to also be recorded. In retrospect I believe that this visual strategy in combination with the decision to leave the antiquated backdrop in place provided an image that both realised and transcended my intentions. Again the way that I have chosen to subsequently read this image gives an insight into how I see it relating to the other images in the growing body of work and how I consider such an analysis contributes to the arguments I have made.



Figure 20: *Untitled* framed pigment print 20" x 16" 2013

Analysis

This image taken in isolation is notable for its apparently objective depiction of a studio that contains a disparate array of props and apparatus from a variety of eras. Indeed the incongruity of these elements obfuscates a clear cut or definitive reading of the scene in terms of its age and function. That we are looking at a studio is beyond question and yet the anachronisms that it seems to encompass lends a sense of oddness and uncertainty to the space...it is indeed difficult to imagine what kind of subject would be pictured here. This sense of oddness is reinforced by the monochromatic painted backdrop which seems to mimic to an unusual degree the décor of the studio around it.

Within the wider context of the exhibition such contemplation also inevitably invites consideration of the themes that have been developed within the other images. The coercive agenda suggested earlier in the images of studio apparatus has been firmly established and here it becomes imbued with an historical dimension. Lalvani's observations on the Victorian studio space as 'A synecdochically organized space, often conveying itself as a drawing room – that

centre of bourgeois domesticity....designed to evoke the necessary symbols of the family and the social order that comprise the bourgeois milieu and within which its subjects are positioned' (Lahvani, 1996: 66) seem tangible here. The sense that a studio portrait is less the depiction of an individual and more the inscription of a social position dictated by 'the discursive regime of the dominant culture they inhabit' (Lahvani, 1996: 63) can be seen to extend from the apparent bourgeois aspirations reflected in this studio through to the modern portrait studio where the subject positions can be argued as equally prescribed.

The apparent neutrality of the image equally allows consideration of a more psychic dimension and its seeming impartiality in this sense renders it pivotal in the project as a whole. The studio in this photograph seems at once and equally, an historical, social and psychically constituted space. The invitation to interpret this image through a psychoanalytic lens is perhaps most strongly signalled through its apparent depiction of lack or absence. This has been a theme developed within many of the previous images primarily through the negation of the subject by blocking or masking and this has often been associated with the establishment of a reoccurring appearance of an apparent void or dark space. Here we have a more straightforward depiction of absence; the studio appearing to await a subject who is not there. We also have however the appearance of a dark space formed by the open door. This leads to a darkness that not only recalls the silhouetted shapes, the dark gaps and the infinite blackness that we have encountered but also highlights the right hand edge of the backdrop which extends just beyond the frame of the open door. The surreal quality of this image is further enhanced by the fact that neither this open door nor the bank of windows offer up any detail of what lies beyond the studio; both appearing as opaque and featureless. The backdrop however pictures a window that whilst only being a painted screen seems to offer a view to the outside world. Hence there is a dimension of trompe l'oeil at play here that serves to create an oscillation in which our apparent mastery of the

scene becomes repeatedly decentred or undermined. In other words what becomes suggested here if only to some small degree is the presence of the Gaze: ‘the objet a in the field of the visible’ (Lacan, 1998: 105). ‘..the petit a, around which there revolves a combat of which trompe-l’oeil is the soul’ (Lacan, 1998: 112).

The point of transfer was marked by an exhibition of the practice at approximately a half way point in the research. This necessitated a number of decisions specifically around the editing and displaying of the work. I needed to consider how the images I had made might best be made to demonstrate a convincing relationship with the extant written thesis whilst maintaining an effective autonomy as an exhibited body of work. I had not up to this point given any serious thought to how I might print and frame my final images. This exhibition necessitated that I pay very close attention to finding the most effective way to realise each piece both in isolation and in relation to the body of work as a whole. The most pressing considerations here were determining an appropriate scale and printing method for each image. Crucial in these decisions was the way that the representation of black space was rendered by different media on the large format printer I had access to through my work as a printer. The rich deep blacks given by baryta paper whilst appropriate for some pieces proved too reflective for others where the softer blacks produced when printing on a cotton rag based matt surface seemed more fitting. These soft blacks whilst less obviously black seemed particularly effective at inviting the viewer through the surface of the print, they seemed to offer no barrier to an illusion of depth. I made many test prints on a variety of surfaces in order to achieve this; finding that it was difficult to confidently predict the most effective media from viewing on a computer screen. I became more attuned to this as the research progressed but still

found that often the only way to be sure with any of the pieces was to make a print and then display it in my home for a few days. I found that each of the elements of the practice demanded a unique attention to presentation in order to make the most of the effects that I hoped it would produce. This extended to the scale of print as well as how the image appeared on the print either set into white space or filling the entire surface. Framing was also crucial and I needed to find a frame maker who I could work with in the realisation of the exhibition. My supervisor recommended a local framer who proved invaluable. I already had a good idea of how I would like the work to be framed and now I had found someone who could make it happen. I felt that it was important that the framing was consistent with the conventions of gallery display for contemporary photographic art practice, that it was of a standard and quality that was beyond question within this context and that it was sympathetic with my object of enquiry. To this end I required a moulding that was both contemporary and understated in design whilst still maintaining a sense of history and tradition. A moulding of thin and uncluttered section provided the former requirement while the use of a dark waxed wood served the latter. The obeche wood moulding I had chosen in consultation with the framer was waxed to a very dark finish to achieve an effect of appearing almost black from a distance but having clearly retained the dark wood colouration and visible grain on closer inspection. The section and style of the frames remained consistent throughout the exhibition but each work required a different attention to the detailing of wax finish, depth and colour of fillet and mounting of the print. This meant that the framing could be seen to act both as a nuanced response to the works and simultaneously as an overarching display aesthetic that linked them together, encouraging an impression of coherence to the body of work as a whole.

One image came to be included in this transfer exhibition almost by accident, yet proved to be one of the pivotal works in the practice as a whole. It was also the piece that, at this point, required the most elaborate attention in terms of framing. The photograph, which is of a young girl (Fig. 21), was taken some years before during my time as a portrait photographer. It was part of a set of photographs that I had taken of a family who were emigrating to the United States and required id. pictures for their visas. Sometimes I would use my own camera to take such images and for some reason the images of this family had not been deleted as was my usual practice. On rediscovering this set of photographs this one image in particular intrigued me and I converted it to black and white and sized it to around 20"x16" with a white border. It was thus radically different to the small square colour image that was originally intended; the quality of the lens, camera and studio lighting used allowing this to be achieved in a particularly striking way. I determined to print this image along with some others that I was preparing for the exhibition, still unsure that it could become a part of my body of work but aware that it seemed to incorporate a number of interesting qualities. As soon as I saw the print I knew that it needed to be displayed in the forthcoming show and this was confirmed enthusiastically by my supervisory team. At the time I was unsure of its place within the practice but it seemed to represent like the other pieces one whole conceptual approach. Just as the objective representation of the very idiosyncratic space of Reeves Studio appeared to signal a generalised conception of studio space so this image seemed to stand in for studio portraiture in general. The talk I gave on my research at this point of transfer required me to consider how this might be achieved through this single image, a condensed version of this analysis is given here.



Figure 21: *Untitled* framed pigment print 20"x16" 2012

Analysis

For the first time, and therefore further confirming the aforementioned methodological eclecticism, I have chosen a photograph that appears to be a straightforward studio portrait. I have made no apparent attempt to manipulate the image, to mask or hide identity. How then are we to decipher this picture, this anonymous girl who stares into the lens and consequently out towards our viewing position? How does this fit with the images we have been describing? Firstly I would suggest that, in fact, it doesn't fit and yet this is where its strengths lie. In the context of the other works this image serves as a clear reminder of the ostensible function of the studio. By simply encountering such a portrait within the flow of images we have been encouraged to consider; images that conspicuously raise questions about the spaces in which portraits become produced, we are actively encouraged to view it with such questions fresh in our minds. If we accept this reasoning we can move on to ask: Why this portrait rather than any other? The answer to this, I believe, lies in the combination of a careful choice of subject, approach and presentation; for

each of these and their combined affect are particularly resistant to easy categorisation. In other words because this image is difficult to read solely as, for instance, a family portrait, a school portrait, an id photo, a fashion image or an advertising image (and yet it contains elements common to each of these), it allows itself to be overlaid with a variety of meanings and ideas without necessarily anchoring them to a particular genre or idiom.⁶⁵ Seen in this way it is easy to appreciate this as an image that can function both as a striking portrait and a blank canvas capable of embodying disparate concepts whilst avoiding any specific allegiance to them. Thus the powerful effect of the portrait itself, as an image, provides a level of contemplation sufficient to convey ideas around the production of subjectivity; encouraging these to be felt or conveyed within the image at a profound level; whilst the portrait's discursive ambiguity helps to maintain the suggestion that these are inherent within the studio apparatus itself rather than at the level of the image.

The print that I made of this image complete with white border was displayed as a material object floated away from the back of the frame with its edges visible. At the time I was unsure of the reasoning behind this decision, believing that it referenced the appearance of printed black and white domestic snapshots from around 1950's more than studio portraiture. However it was such an aesthetically effective method of displaying the print that I went with it as it certainly did not seem to compromise the associations I have described. Only later when I chose to use a similar method of framing

⁶⁵ This ambiguity is in part achieved through the model's direct address to the camera; a convention that in being common to many genres or practices seems wholly unremarkable but at the same time seems to embody a number of contradictions. As David Campany points out 'The look of the subject may be direct, but what exactly is addressed? 'Us'? A machine? A photographer?'. Recounting Barthes' assertion that direct address 'separates attention from perception, and yields up only the former...an aim without a target' Campany concludes that direct address is not direct at all. (Campany, 2011: 81). This has been exploited by Thomas Ruff whose *Portraits* (1981-2001) make use of direct address, in conjunction with an excessive level of detail, as a means to challenge the idea that the photograph might be capable of depicting identity in any meaningful form beyond surface appearance.

on another work did this method of display begin to make sense. In this later work, a still life (Fig. 28) the display strategy bears a more direct association to the image but within the final exhibition context it served to make links with this little girl image encouraging associations between these two works that might otherwise not have been made. This kind of serendipitous approach has been a characteristic of the development of practice here in the sense that many of the interlinking themes and motifs have not been consciously sought but once identified have become utilised in decisions around editing, placing, scale and framing. Their presence is exploited as a means of bouncing ideas and associations from one work to the next creating a kind of dialogue and encouraging the idea that themes proposed in one image might still be present in another even if the theme or apparent propositions of this image seem remote or unrelated.

After my transfer meeting it was a long time before I produced more practical work. It was apparent that I needed to progress rapidly with the thesis and for maybe six months this took precedence. I was aware however that more images were needed and I had begun to formulate ideas, based around the presentation of practice at the transfer exhibition, as to what these might look like. I found that I had little desire to visit more studios and I had tired of images that functioned through the negation of identity or the turning back of the subject. Three things, I believe, changed the way that I thought about practice and how I might proceed. First I now had a conception of a body of work that simply needed the addition of images in order to make it complete. Second I had begun writing on other artistic practices around the studio in my thesis and third I had begun teaching a module on allegory on the BA course here at Brighton.

I was in no hurry to produce further work but I had a lot of time to consider what to do next. One idea that I knew required a lot of forward planning was to produce a large image of a backdrop on my 5x4 camera similar to my *Cachet* images but much better technically and incorporating the space that the backdrop created rather than simply the flat representation of its surface. To realise this I needed a backdrop which would, when photographed, epitomize and evoke the idea of backdrops in general whilst still maintaining a compelling individuality. Preliminary tests with generic or off the shelf backdrops proved disappointing and predictable however and I decided that the only way to make this happen was to commission a bespoke backdrop. After a great deal of consideration and based upon an intense and sustained attention to the appearance of photographic backdrops over the previous two years I arrived at the following specifications. I required a large heavy cloth backdrop that utilised a nebulous cloudy effect, was lighter in the centre, darker towards the edges and in a colour palette that was not too boring yet not overly vivid consisting of predominantly, but not exclusively, blue or green hues. Once I had ordered, and eventually received, this I set about photographing it in a large village hall that I had hired for the purpose. I knew that I needed to achieve a certain distance from the backdrop; that it needed to be fully extended with its lower section trailing onto the floor and that I would need to light it with studio flash. This entire process from ordering the backdrop, arranging the shoot and getting the 5x4 film processed was both protracted and expensive and initially I found the results to be very disappointing. I believed that this experiment had failed, the 5x4 negatives looked poorly exposed and the provisional scans I had requested from the processing lab only confirmed my suspicions. Even when I did get around to producing high quality scans I did not see the potential that I had hoped for. Finally however after several months had passed, and other projects had been set in motion, I revisited these

scans and began to appreciate what they contained. I decided to concentrate my efforts on one image, the one that seemed closest to my original intention. The qualities of the backdrop that had been captured on the 5x4 film were very difficult to recognise at first, in fact they only became truly apparent after much careful Photoshop work followed by the production of large full scale test strips on an appropriate cotton rag surface. Once I had produced these however I knew that I could make a print that would far transcend the qualities that had characterised the *Cachet* series which it sought to replace. This image needed to be printed at a scale where these qualities could be readily appreciated. It needed to create the impression that the surface of the print and the surface of the cloth were equally tangible, that one could not be sure where the qualities of painted cloth and the qualities of photographic surface began and ended. Consequently this image was printed at a much larger scale than the other images within the body of work and it became the centre piece of the final exhibition (Fig. 22). It was framed without any border and at a size that allowed a sense of immersion within the space at a close viewing distance. The use of a relatively deep black fillet, distancing the image from the surface of the glass, helped to encourage the impression of gazing through the frame into the space. The detail of the 5x4, however, helped to emphasise the surface markings on the cloth which provided a contradictory effect; blocking a way into the deeply receding space suggested by the cloudy design on the cloth from a distance. I chose to print this on the matt fine art cotton rag surface which emphasised the painterly nature of the cloth both its own painted representation of nebulous clouds and its surface folds and defects.⁶⁶ The

⁶⁶ There is a very particular effect that is achieved through the photographic representation of surfaces that have been painted in order to depict other environments. David Campany describes Edward Weston's photographs of film-set facades as 'photographic realism turned in on itself, as a kind of *trompe l'oeil*....The photographs appear whole, integral, unified and pure, and at the same time quotational and reflexive' (Campany. 2011: 49)

impression is therefore akin to looking at both a photograph and a painting, the relationship between the two different yet equally apparent at different viewing distances.

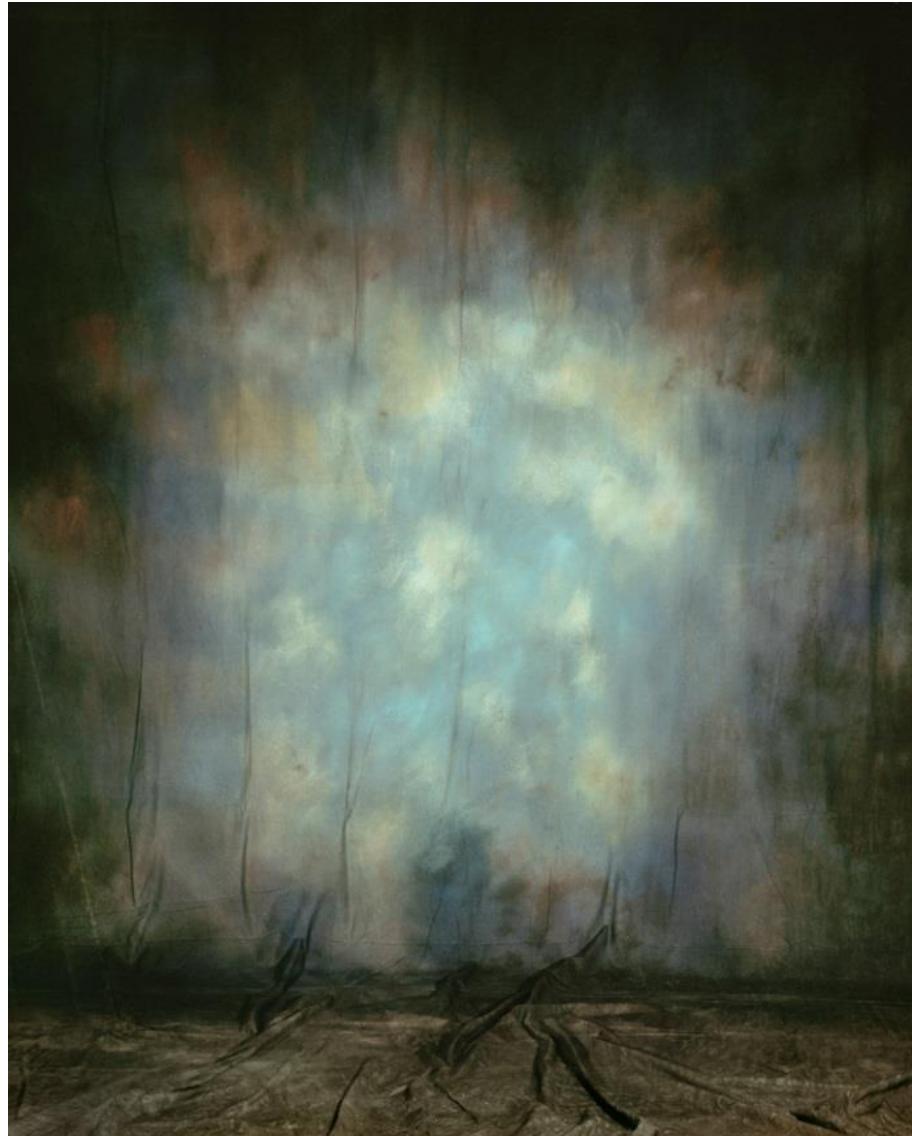


Figure 22: *Untitled* framed pigment print 42"x34" 2014

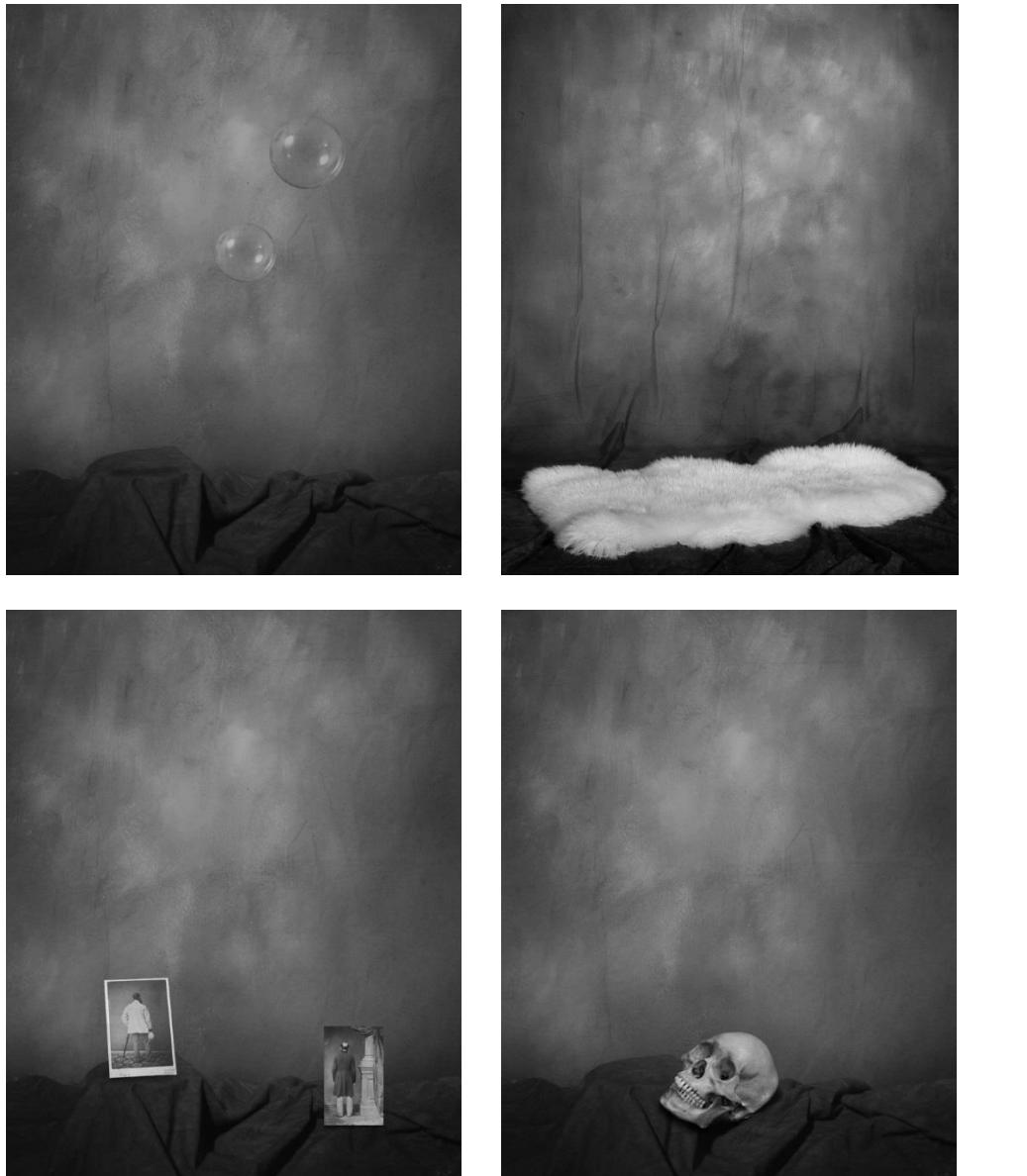
The long gestation period for this image, and my initial belief that it had not been successful, led to a number of other experiments. I was, at this time, asked to teach a BA photography practice unit on allegory at Brighton and this gave me the confidence to try

out some deliberately staged still lives using the backdrop I had commissioned and the lights I had borrowed in order to photograph it. I wanted to create images that were uncertain in terms of scale but that would also be easily read as signifying the portrait studio. I chose to do this by creating small sets that were completely covered in the backdrop cloth. This allowed the mise en scène of the image to be completely made up of the cloudy backdrop, as it would in a portrait, whilst allowing for the inclusion of a raised foreground surface or platform, more consistent with traditional still life arrangements. The use of the backdrop cloth in providing the background, the cover to the surface and the foreground, where it drapes from the surface, meant that I could create a setting on which to arrange quite small objects whilst still alluding to the somewhat larger space formed by similar backdrops in a portrait studio.

I tried a variety of experiments with this arrangement testing different objects within the space. I found that by leaving a gap of approximately three feet between the cloth hanging to form the background and the foreground surface, that the cloth extended to cover, I was able to achieve a pleasing sense of depth to the images. Choosing a relatively low yet square on and frontal camera position I could give the objects placed on this surface a sense of monumental importance. In fact once I had this in place I could simply move objects in and out of the composition and rearrange them until I achieved the effect I was after. This was a new way of working for me and I was very aware that I was drawing not only from a tradition of still life painting but also from some of the contemporary photographic practices (notably Olivier Richon, Laura Letinsky and Lucas Blalok) that had already sought to do this. The knowledge of these precedents had a contradictory effect, giving me both confidence in the validity of my approach and at the same time an acute awareness that I was attempting something that was not my own. I

knew that I felt less comfortable trying to arrange objects in a constructed space rather than simply encountering them in situ; I enjoyed the process yet I struggled to view the results without experiencing an overly acute sense that the images appeared contrived and naïve. I think that this critical self-reflection proved useful however as it caused me to persevere with an idiom that I was unsure of, to the point that I began producing results that seemed to be working. I found that there was a certain point when a collection of objects seemed to be producing a promising image but that it was very easy to then over think the arrangement, to tweak it slightly and suddenly find that its sense of spontaneity and conviction would vanish. I realised that in order to avoid a sense of being contrived even within a genre characterised by contrivance I needed to maintain a sense of the moment, of the unforeseen, of chance.

My choice of objects was a combination of things that I had already considered as relevant and things that suggested themselves to me as I began shooting. My initial idea was to simply photograph this constructed environment with just one object added, and some of these experiments are shown below (Figs. 23-26).



Figures 23-26: Unused still life images (2014)

The rug and the bubble both of which have become clichés of child studio portraiture were early attempts and these went on to become the main subject of another large format shot which ultimately became dropped (Fig.27). The skull and the cartes de visite were other early experiments.



Figure 27: Unused still life image (2014)

It was the introduction of an antique wooden box however that finally provided the necessary arrangement of objects. This box provided a large architectural presence within the shot one that allowed other smaller objects to be positioned in and around it. It was also a rather mysterious object, made more so by the space. The introduction of old carte de visite portraits and its shape and size in relation to these seemed to suggest that it was in some way a piece of photographic apparatus. Its function as a box, or small room even, was also useful. Once I had the ingredients that seemed to be working in this way I just needed to find a way to arrange them so that these ambiguities and uncertainties within the image were somehow maximised. I realised that certain shapes and compositions began to reference Holbein's *The Ambassadors* and I determined to play on this just enough to help me in my immediate compositional decisions rather than adding further elements which I feared would begin to signal this association too explicitly and undermine the internal dialogue between the objects I had already included.

The reference to Holbein I determined to keep obscure enough so that it would be questioned (in terms of intent) even by those who might perceive it. It would I hoped add to the layers of inconclusive and ambiguous meaning that the piece seemed to be setting up. This work along with the subsequent appropriated pieces (Fig. 29) became exhibited at the Brighton MA show in 2014 under the collective title '*Screen*'. This signals a definitive emphasis on the photographic backdrop in the latter stages of the practice research. My own reading of this work, prepared in preparation for this exhibition, shows how I chose to relate it to the theoretical debates I was engaging at the time.



Figure 28: *Untitled* framed pigment print 20"x16" 2014

Analysis

The studio backdrop as a screen becomes exploited here, played with in a series of visual devices that each and collectively point towards its metonymic relation to desire. In Lacan's schema

desire comes into being with the acquisition of language when the Desire of the Mother becomes renounced and substituted by Name of the Father. Something is lost here, but this lost object (the object of the mother's desire) can never be symbolised and exists in the failure of language to adequately articulate the subject's needs. The symbolic register therefore functions in the manner of a screen and the maternal phallus (that which is lacking in the mother) becomes the lost object, forever missing, forever veiled...a lack. The backdrop can suggest or allude to this because it replays synecdochically the action of producing a reality whilst simultaneously masking another.

If we start towards the back of the depicted space in this image we can see that the nebulous decoration of the draped cloth backdrop is announced as a screen by the appearance of its edge on the right hand side. We are thus invited to consider the space that lies beyond and behind this backdrop and to reconsider the backdrop as a screen rather than a depicted space. Once this dichotomy of the backdrop is accepted it can be identified as a repeated motif within the image. The box (another synecdochal device) that forms the main subject of the image contains two objects⁶⁷. The first is a black circular plinth suggesting both a space for display and an absence; the second is a square photograph which appears to hover inside the space. This photograph depicting the back view of a woman includes its own depiction of a backdrop which the woman faces. This is a plainer backdrop than the cloth beyond the box but it contains marks that suggest aging or deterioration and the overall effect of this seems echoed in the aged and distressed back of the box itself. Thus we have a succession of screens that retreat into the image each

⁶⁷ The wooden box used in this image seems to carry a number of associations whilst remaining rather ambiguous as an object. Beyond a synecdoche for the studio it invites associations with the camera apparatus, particularly the large wooden plate cameras of the mid to late 19th century that would be associated with the types of portrait depicted. This is encouraged by the figure of the woman who both faces and obscures the centre of the front face of the box which would traditionally house the lens facing as it faces back towards the backcloth. There is also a reference to the term 'agalma' used by Plato in the Symposium and adopted by Lacan as a metaphor for *l'objet petit a*. The agalma is a precious offering which resides inside a box, a box which itself has little value and may take many forms. (Lacan, 1991)

presenting both a spatial environment and a masking of what is beyond it. The display of the 20" x 16" print itself furthers this effect through the use of a white border (indicating the surface of the print beyond the image) and the way that the print is set into and held away from the back of the frame. This mirrors the hovering of the photograph in the box and signals that the print itself is acting as a screen by hinting at the space behind it. Once this has been established the screening effect of the frame itself and then the gallery wall behind it might be imagined, or even (working forward) the glass in front of the print and indeed the physicality of our own perception.

The carte de visite of a bearded man, which appears precariously balanced, hanging forward of the ledge at the bottom of the image, both reinforces the idea of portraiture and mimics the trompe l'oeil effects used in 17th century Dutch still life paintings⁶⁸. Trompe l'oeil is discussed by Lacan in terms of pretence, a pretence that goes beyond an illusory equivalence to real objects (Lacan, 1998: 112). The significance of trompe l'oeil is that it does not announce itself as the giving of appearance and as such has the ability to undermine our relationship with and mastery of the image. In this sense the carte de visite here in announcing the presence of trompe l'oeil also serves to propose a certain reflexive and cautious relationship with the image. It also incorporates a suggestion that such caution and deception are not restricted to images such as this, that openly seek to propose and interrogate. Even the quotidian, prosaic carte de visite, perhaps the epitome of a socially determined representation of identity, is signalled as complicit in a similar play of

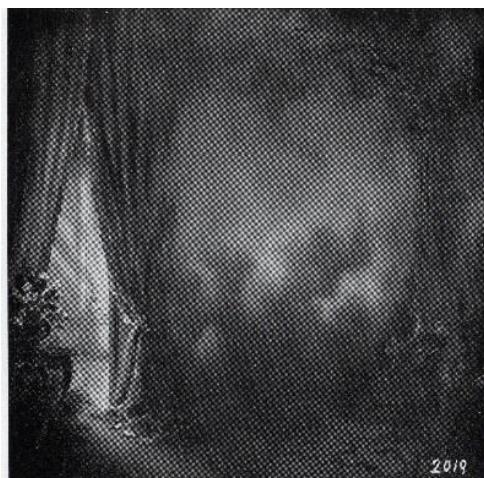
⁶⁸ The depiction of objects overhanging the edge of a table is a convention common to the still life genre. Beyond its function as a trompe l'oeil device it was used, particularly in Vanitas and Momento Mori painting popular in the 17th century, to symbolise the precarious and uncertain nature of human existence. Such paintings were themselves frequently painted on the reverse of portraits as a reminder of the mortality of the sitter. (Britannica, 2014)

*desire. Just because we can't see the edges doesn't mean that they are not there.*⁶⁹

The other piece of work that I had begun to develop at this time, and that formed the other component of the ‘Screen’ work exhibited in the MA show, was from a series of scanned images I had made during my visit to Reeves studios (Fig. 29). These images, taken from a Kodak trade catalogue from 1917, depicted a variety of backdrop designs then available to the studio portrait photographer. It was perhaps six months since I had made these scans and I had been unsure of how or even if I could use them. The backdrops depicted were beautiful and hugely evocative in their depiction of nebulous cloudy spaces that also incorporated the suggestion ethereal spaces beyond. The reproductions however were small and of poor quality. I decided to revisit these images without much hope of success, trying various different methods of cropping and sizing. A key decision here was to leave in the text under the images. I decided to see this text as a part of the image rather than as separate from it. This was done in a very specific way which at the time was based on this premise: If I imagined the images of backdrops to be actual backdrops I could then imagine the page they were on as a studio space. I could then effectively make a crop as if I was taking a photograph within that studio space. In each ‘photograph’ then I have pictured the backdrop dropping from the top of the image

⁶⁹ There is a link between *trompe l'oeil* and the screen in the classical Greek tale of Zeuxis and Parrhasios; two painters who competed to produce the most convincing depiction of reality. Zeuxis painted grapes of such realism that birds flew down and tried to peck them. Parrhasios challenged this painting with one of his own. Zeuxis in attempting to draw back the curtain that veils Parrhasios’ painting realises that the curtain is the painting. Zeuxis had deceived the birds but Parrhasios had deceived Zeuxis. For Lacan this demonstrates something beyond the verisimilitude of painting. The realism of the grapes can only be deceptive to birds, Lacan surmises, because they are depicted in a manner ‘closer to the sign’; that is more like actual grapes than a representation of grapes (of the type painted by Carravagio in the basket of Bacchus for example). The realism that deceives man hides or masks reality through the illusion of representation which is, in effect, a screen. ‘The example of Parrhasios makes it clear that if one wishes to deceive a man, what one presents to him is the painting of a veil, that is to say, something that incites him to ask what is behind it.’ (Lacan 1998: 112).

with a small section of wall (the off white of the catalogue page) just visible along each edge. Where the backdrop ends it meets the floor which on the page is made up of text. The text therefore is viewed in terms of an area of floor within a photographed space rather than as text on a page in a conventional sense. Having made these crops and set these onto a white area of space ready for printing I still had serious doubts as to whether this might be able to constitute a component of the practice. I enjoyed making this work and I personally really liked the results and yet it seemed far too banal, obscure, esoteric and pretentious to be valid. I printed two of these images purely for my own satisfaction. It was only when my supervisors both praised these prints and also pointed out how they resonated with the still life I had produced that I felt validated and confident enough to print them as a set and get them framed. These six images I consider the most personal work I have produced in this research. I have written more on this in my conclusion but here is my subsequent analysis of this work.



Design No. 2019. Price, 8×6 ... 18/-; 8×7 ... 21/-;
8×8 ... 25/-; 8×8×7 ... 42/-



Design No. 1031. Gives charming sketchy effects around
the figure. In three sizes—7 ft. × 5 ft. 12/-, 8 ft. × 6 ft.
18/-, 9 ft. × 8 ft. 25/- Continuous if desired.

Figure 29: *Untitled* two framed pigment prints from a set of six 16"x12" 2014

Analysis

This work appears deceptively straightforward. Illustrations of photographic backdrops from an historic catalogue have been reproduced framed and displayed with little or no obvious additions, alterations or intervention on the part of the artist. Indeed it is this initial consternation that provides the viewer with an effective starting point for reading this work. The lack of apparent authorial input itself promotes a questioning. The appearance of the prints seems extremely close to the kinds of reproductions of historical material that might be readily encountered within the context of a museum display. They seem to illustrate rather than comment. However the work is presented within a gallery context as artistic practice and as such become open to scrutiny in these terms. The search for evidence of artistic authorship is rewarded only in the subtle detailing of the selections themselves; apparent in the idiosyncratic cropping that runs throughout the series. The seemingly conventional reproduction of text below the image is on closer inspection revealed as in fact determined by a seemingly arbitrary subjugation to the image. Once this is determined the text can only be viewed as part of the overall image rather than an addition to it. For the viewer this sets up a kind of oscillation with the image in which the easy pleasures presented by the reproduced backdrops are both invited and simultaneously challenged by the inclusion of the fragmented text.⁷⁰ The text can be seen to serve a number of different functions here. On one level it provides a reminder of the commercial nature of these images. It also provides an insight into the world of the professional portrait studio and demonstrates that the backdrop itself is a commodity; one that is determined by the specific demands of the industry in relation to perceived and speculated client demand. The point here is that links are made between the imaginary dimension and the ideological dimension. One cannot exist here independently of the other and

⁷⁰ The illustrations on the backdrops themselves seem to allude to an imaginary dimension through depictions of dark voids and the metonymic depiction of screening and this aspect becomes encouraged by the present context. The series is exhibited alongside the subsequent still life image and these allusions are further encouraged through the dialogue created between the two works. The more allegorical still life contains various points of convergence with these images which then become open to similar consideration.

the nature of their relationship is therefore proposed as relevant. In effect this could be considered to happen within the original catalogue but here becomes emphasised through the change of context. There is another level however on which the inclusion of text operates; one that serves to underscore and reinforce this association between the discursive and the imaginary. The cropping of the text here; truncating sentences, even cutting through words, presents the written word with seeming disregard for its intended meaning and an apparent emphasis on its formal quality as simply marks or shapes on a surface. Thus the viewer is invited to see language itself as somehow arbitrary, as a system, having no direct or given relationship with its referents. It is not just a Saussurian structuralism that is invoked here however, but rather how this has become employed by Lacan in relation to the constitution of the subject. The imaginary is suggested in these works through their depictions of absence and the screen but the inclusion of language as an integral part of the image proposes a consideration of their interdependent relationship.

For Lacan desire which originates in the child's imaginary hypothesis of the maternal phallus is the by-product of language because it represents what is left behind in the subject's relocation of the phallus as aligned with the Name of the Father. The phallus in being symbolically relocated elsewhere through the acceptance of language is thus something that has been lost and becomes an ultimate object of desire. This is the resolution, for Lacan, of the Oedipal complex; the subject being castrated through having to accept the symbolisation imposed by language. This is also key to an understanding of what Lacan means when he says 'man's desire is the desire of the other' (Lacan and Sheridan, 1977: 292)

Desire is that which is manifested in the interval that demand hollows within itself, in as much as the subject, in articulating the signifying chain, brings to light the want-to-be, together with the

appeal to receive the compliment from the Other, if the Other, the locus of speech, is also the locus of this want, or lack.' (Lacan and Sheridan, 1977: 291)

The subject is never fully able to articulate through language what he/she needs but is restricted by the confines of language which belongs to the Other. In other words what the subject demands is never what the subject actually needs because language will always leave a gap and it is this gap which constitutes desire. Lacan continues:

- *If desire is an effect in the subject of the condition that is imposed on him by the existence of the discourse, to make his need pass through the defiles of the signifier.'*
- *If, on the other hand...by opening up the dialectic of the transference, we must establish the notion of the Other with a capital O as being the locus of the deployment of speech.'*
- *It must be posited that, produced as it is by an animal at the mercy of language, man's desire is the desire of the Other.'* (Lacan and Sheridan, 1977: 292)

The inclusion of language as a component of these images therefore marks a way that we can begin to formulate a conception of how the coercive discourse of the commercial portrait studio might be integrally linked to the unconscious desires of the subject constituted within its apparatus.

It was only after these works had been displayed at the MA show in 2014 that I set to work on producing a large print of the 5x4 backdrop image (Fig. 22) which along with these pieces was to complete the practice. However I found that once I had produced this large print (after months of preparation and editing) I entered a final creative phase. I

found that I felt somehow liberated from the pressures of having to produce work and as a consequence ideas for new work seemed to present themselves to me. I followed these through, safe in the knowledge that if they failed it was of little consequence but if they succeeded it might make a valuable contribution to my final body of work.

I produced two further pieces of work both in some way drawing from the earlier still life shoot. The first of these made use of a printed portrait and a folder mount (Fig. 30). The portrait was one I had been reproducing at work. The mount came from a collection of unused mounts that I had rescued from the studio in which I worked when it closed down. The success of both the still life and the appropriations and the positive comments I had received during the MA show had given me a new found confidence in my ability to photograph objects in a still life idiom and also to trust my instincts in terms of making seemingly radical decisions. This I believe is reflected in the still life that I produced here which is noticeably more economical visually. I wanted to bring the photographic print as an object and as the product of the studio encounter into the practice. This I had done tentatively in the first still life with the included portraits but here I wanted to assert the print as important and to do so in a way that would suggest a relationship between the ideas that had been proposed around the space and how these might be seen to relate to the images produced in that space. I deliberately used the motifs of the screen and the black rectangular shape that I had identified as reoccurring throughout the practice. This is perhaps the first time that I had consciously sought to incorporate themes, knowing they would function as leitmotifs, at the point of shooting rather than retrospectively. I was also aware that the image would appear very contrived but decided to make a point of this rather than trying to conceal it. The decision to shoot against a clean white surface was again a conscious reference, this time to the Venture

portrait style that I discussed at the end of Chapter 1. I was very aware that this hadn't been reflected at all in the practice so far and I was keen to redress this.



Figure 30: *Untitled* framed pigment print 20" x 16" 2014

Analysis

Within the context of this visual research this image suggests that we consider how our theorising of the studio space might be evidenced through the objects of its production. This can be seen to occur at a number of different registers. These include: that of the image or the portrait itself, that of the materiality of the print, that of the commodity and perhaps most crucially that of the objectification of a subjectivity. When Barthes describes the process of being photographed he talks of being 'neither a subject or an object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object' he talks of becoming 'Total Image, which is to say Death in person; others – the Other – do not dispossess me of myself, they turn me ferociously, into an object, they put me at their mercy, at their disposal, classified in a file, ready for the subtlest deceptions' (Barthes, 1993: 14) Such an

object we have pictured in this portrait. However personal or faithful a portrait this may be it is still demonstrably at the mercy of the Other...an object born of a sovereign subjectivity but radically removed from the subject to become an anonymous image. The process of objectification that occurred the moment the shutter clicked is emphasised here through the use of appropriation in which an existing and anonymous portrait has been plucked from its cultural flow. Any personal associations that this portrait undoubtedly possessed have become generalised and the emphasis becomes placed on the portrait as a representation of a type. This type of portraiture might be described as commercial, domestic, probably from the 1960's, characterised by the use of an aesthetic derived from fashion and celebrity portraiture in order to portray the young lady sitter as glamorous and sophisticated. The presentation folder serves to reinforce the notion that this is a commodity and despite the tropes of glamour employed is most probably a domestic portrait. The folder both serves to connote the localised and domestic application of an iconic style and to reinforce the sense of a certain professionalism.⁷¹ What reinforces Barthes' argument is the sense, again provided through the strategy of appropriation which, in presenting an image within another, seems to suggest an exaggerated impression of presence within the depicted image. The young lady seems in other words to have a physical presence within this image and is therefore pictured as trapped under the glassine sheet, within the folder and within the conventions of portraiture that have determined her demeanour. Her objectivity is manifest but her original subjectivity is suggested and a consideration of how the one relates to the other is proposed.

⁷¹ The portrait presentation folder has been noted as a device used by commercial photographers in order to distinguish their products from amateur domestic photography...it signifies a commercial product and connotes a certain 'professionalism' thereby reinforcing an impression of value and helping to justify the cost of the sitting and the print to the client.(Lush: 1986)

The other image that I produced during this renewed creative phase was conceived during a photoshoot I had assisted with. I had loaned my backdrop to a friend and set up a similar arrangement to my earlier still life shoot in order to photograph some artifacts from her family's flower nursery that was soon to close down. The lighting used on this shoot was very dramatic consisting of a single spot that illuminated the objects within a space that whilst entirely populated by the backdrop cloth remained largely unlit and therefore very dark (Fig. 31)



Figure 31: *Untitled* framed pigment print 20"x16" 2014

I recognised two things here, firstly the ambiguous sense of scale that I had sought earlier seemed enhanced with this arrangement and second, there seemed a potential to draw together the black motifs and cloudy backdrops in one final image. This image would be so dark as to appear almost black, it would have nothing in it but it would on close inspection be comprised of a very dark space formed entirely by the backdrop. I

shot a whole roll of film on this empty space using the same exposure that had been used to render the nursery objects visible. In the first shot I left the grit and soil that had fallen from these objects where it lay. For subsequent exposures I swept it up. When the film was developed scanned I found that the grit gave a point of focus that both drew the viewer into the image and served to hold them within the space. It was this that convinced me to print this exposure and I found that in the print this effect was enhanced with the pile of dirt taking on a kind of magical quality but without distracting from a contemplation of the space itself. In fact this seemed enhanced. Much in the way that the diptych of the debutant acts as an introduction to this body of work so this image seems to form a coda. It says nothing particularly new but rather offers a space of reflection and marks the backdrop as perhaps the defining motif of the practice. The practice has thus come full circle from its initial concern for the surface of the backdrop through an expanded investigation of the apparatus, the blind spot and the screen where the backdrop once again becomes implicated not just as a surface but for the role that it plays in the functioning of the studio as a discursive space and a mise en scene of desire.

I was now satisfied that the practice was complete and I arranged to get the large backdrop image and these final other two framed ready for the final exhibition. The final exhibition marked the first time that all of the practice had been brought together in one space. The gallery that I had managed to procure for this was small but well appointed (Figs. 32-35). I had chosen this venue because it would allow my work to be exhibited in isolation, away from the work of other students. The inevitable presence of others work at the larger university gallery would I felt have inevitably compromise and weaken the effect of my own practice. I felt that it was important particularly now that the body of work was complete that I could create a viewing environment that was

to a certain extent immersive. By this I mean that the space needed to be totally devoted to the contemplation of the portrait studio as represented through my own practice and that this should surround and enclose the viewer as much as possible. Also important was the availability of effective gallery lighting which could help to minimize the effect of reflections. This had been a particular problem in my previous two exhibitions at the main university gallery, which was predominantly lit by a large bank of windows. These inevitably became reflected in the glass of the framed pieces on display, particularly within the darker areas of my work. These areas needed to appear as free from distracting reflections as possible in order to effectively convey their conflated allusions to depth and masking and also to maximize the effect of their reoccurring presence between pieces. I had considered the use of non-reflective glass but had decided that this also might compromise the work through its somewhat disconcerting effect which I found seemed to announce itself as an unusual feature when encountering it in the work of others.

The gallery required slight modification in order to accommodate the complete body of work without undue crowding and also in order to cover a large wall mounted monitor that was a permanent fixture of the gallery. Despite initial concerns that the space would be too small I feel that the final show made use of the space in a way that actually helped the work. The small enclosed nature of the gallery together with the lighting had the effect of immersing the viewer within the work as I had hoped. The pieces were spaced just far enough apart to allow an appreciation of their individual qualities yet were close enough to encourage considerations of how each related to each other. This happened not just between adjacent works but also with works on opposite walls and once associations had been recognised, then with each of the other works within the show

which was so arranged as to maximise the visibility of the majority of the pieces from any one viewing position.

One exception to this was the positioning of the final piece I have described (the dark backdrop space (Fig. 31)). This I had situated on the side panel of the protruding box structure which was the required modification to the space I have mentioned. In order to view this work it was necessary to stand very close to it and initially I was concerned that this both denied a full appreciation of the work and compromised the other pieces around it. This was the one part of the show that could be argued to be too cramped the pieces being placed into a proximity with each other that was unconventional. However the intimate viewing position required in order to appreciate this work meant that the qualities of enclosure I had tried to incorporate into the photograph were greatly enhanced. This was furthered by the judicious positioning of one of the gallery lights which caused the small traces of grit within the photographed space to shine out from the dark surface on which they rested encouraging an intense contemplation of these and therefore an effective projection by the viewer into the depicted space. The danger with this work in particular was that if positioned more conventionally it may have appeared too similar to the completely black image of studio space that forms a part of one of the diptychs (Fig.12) and not draw out its more subtle qualities. Its final position in the show allowed this association but in a more suitably understated fashion (Fig. 32).

The realisation of this final show helped to reassert the importance of the practice within this research project after a period of intense engagement with the completion and submission of the thesis. The gallery provided the perfect setting for my viva

examination and the revised reflections on practice, recommended during this, have allowed me to integrate the experience of this show into the thesis.





Figures 32-35: Installation shots from the final show at
The Dorset Place Gallery in Brighton July 2015

Conclusion

This research began with the making of photographic work. This work whilst not fully resolved led to a proposal which went on to become developed through the sustained production of photographic practice and this written thesis. In the introduction to this thesis I presented a series of historical and theoretical propositions surrounding the production and reception of the vernacular photographic portrait. These suggested that whilst such portraiture was and is a widespread practice it remains poorly represented in historical accounts of the medium, a situation made all the more remarkable by the notable use of vernacular portraits by theorists who seek to present ideas around the *eidos* of photography itself. The identification of these anomalies served as the point of departure for our investigation which views them not only as symptomatic of a commercial practice but as qualities that can be argued to imbue the spaces, within which such practices take place, with particular characteristics. The photographic studio is thus presented as a space for consideration; a constituent of the apparatus of photography that can be explored as a site within which the anomalies we have recognised become played out in relation to the subjects that become positioned within it. Indeed it could be argued that these propositions were in many ways already inherent in the initial practice that served to precipitate them.

Within this thesis I have further developed these considerations, initially by laying out the history of the studio from a rather traditional narrative perspective before providing a more Foucauldian discourse analysis at two pertinent junctures. With the studio thus established and demarcated as a historically and discursively constituted apparatus I have been able to effectively interrogate this apparatus in terms of how it might be seen to

produce a particular subjectivity for the bodies that become positioned within it. The anxiety that I noted from my own observations of the studio space becomes relevant here and serves as a starting point to understanding the nature of this subjectivity. Drawing from Apparatus Theory I suggest that the studio mobilises and recalls certain regressive states that might effectively be theorised through Lacanian psychoanalysis. The space of the studio, and the photographic encounter that it is organised around, recall in very particular ways, quite distinct from the cinema spectator, the Lacanian Mirror Stage and the Lacanian Gaze. The Gaze as the manifestation of *l'objet petit a* in the visual field can be thought of as being mobilised within the photographic apparatus itself and particularly within the blind spot figured by the camera lens; a blind spot around which desire is mobilised at the point of being photographed. The idea of the studio as an architecture that is constructed around this subject position marks it as a space of modernity because this space exists only as a part of the photographic apparatus. The way that anxiety plays a part in this schema is related to the potential for photography to be likened to an encounter with the real. The conventionalised and seemingly banal images that become produced by the majority of traditional portrait studios rather than failing to reveal the inner self of the sitter actually threaten to betray the absence of such an inner self. In other words the space of the studio engenders anxiety because it is a space that holds the potential to reveal the lack on which the ego is founded.

Certain artists who have turned their attention to the studio prove useful to this enquiry as a means to expand the theoretical arguments and to help contextualise my own practice. Ideas around the subject object relationships played out within the studio in relation to Jemima Stehli's practice suggest Merleau Ponty's idea of *Chiasm* or intertwining which helps to expand upon the idea of the Gaze as located within the

studio. Similarly a reading of Broomberg and Chanarin's *American Landscapes* series helps to further the Althusserian argument that man's lived relationship with the world, as manifest in prevailing ideology and through cultural practices, is itself based on a misrecognition and located in the Lacanian imaginary. It is within less explicitly critical commercial practices however that we find the most compelling visual substantiation for my thesis. In particular Suresh Punjabi's studio portraits, subsequently represented and analysed by Christopher Pinney, provide a compelling visual presentation of how the ambiguous relationship between social convention and *tuché* is somehow manifest within the architecture of the studio at the level of the apparatus. This also serves to demonstrate that there is not an extant body of photographic work that seeks to interrogate this ambiguity. The subsequent reflections upon my own practice serve to provide an understanding of how the practical research has come into being and is interspersed with speculative readings of the work that continue to bolster and inform the argument. The practice has thus formed a starting point for the research; a means to further develop the theoretical material it has proposed and ultimately, as I will argue below, a productive way to provide its conclusion.

My methodological approach for this investigation has outlined the use of photographic practice as a primary research tool; positioning this as a site of argument and reflection. The practice has been informed in part by the cultural, historical, theoretical and artistic discussions laid out in this thesis which has served to provide the practice with a set of contexts within which it is positioned. At the same time this thesis has acted as a response to the practice; articulating and speculating on the ideas that the practice seems to propose. This reciprocal relationship between practice and thesis means that both are necessary components of the research which can be argued to proceed through the

dialogue that exists between them. It is the nature of this relationship and in particular the way that the practice has been utilised within the research that will form the focus of this conclusion. It is easy to forget, when reading through a thesis of this nature, that our investigation has been generated, primarily, through a practical engagement; that is through the making of photographs. Thus whilst this conclusion will unavoidably form a part of this thesis its most useful function will be to reassert the importance of the practice. The practice in this sense will form the conclusion just as it formed our starting point. The theoretical ideas that have been articulated within this thesis form a relationship with the practice that might be best described as a speculative response. To attempt to reify these ideas into a set of defining or conclusive statements (beyond the summing up I have provided above) would therefore risk side-lining the practice, diminishing its central role and foreclosing its own distinctive engagement with the object of enquiry.

.As a way to further understand how this practice can be thought to function within the context of this project I would like to recount Victor Burgin who uses a musical example in order to demonstrate how artistic practice might be usefully considered in relation to the production of knowledge whilst simultaneously being produced as a response to theoretical ideas.

Burgin recounts that, in 1624, Claudio Monteverdi composed a piece of music, *Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*, that whilst adhering to an established madrigal tradition constituted a new and radical addition to it. Monteverdi stated in the introduction to the published madrigal that he had composed the piece in response to reading medical treatises that described three types of bodily states or ‘humors’.

Monteverdi realised that the first two of these humors; love and tranquillity, corresponded to extant madrigal forms whilst the third; anger, did not. Consequently Monteverdi was inspired to invent a new form of madrigal (*stile concitato*) as an expression of this third humor. Burgin points out that had Monteverdi been engaged in producing a PhD rather than writing music he would most likely have concerned himself with the origin of the theory of humors as well as the current medical discourses which engaged them...it might, as Burgin pithily adds, 'have affected the evolution of medical science in Italy, but would not have given us the *stile concitato*.' (Burgin, 2009: 75) This is useful for our purposes because, as Burgin points out, the musical work acts independently of the theory which gave rise to it. In fact whilst medical theories regarding humors have little bearing on contemporary medical thinking this does not have any bearing on the madrigal style that Monteverdi invented which exists as an important and valued addition to the repertoire and will have played its own part in the development of western musical forms. It is the idea of practice acting as a response to theory and yet having value in its own rite that is important here; it allows us to think of an artistic practice as constituting its own distinct form of knowledge.

If we can accept this, it is not too much of a leap to begin to consider how such practice might itself then go on to act in relation to the generation of a new theoretical text and how this might serve to engage theoretical ideas in a unique and potentially useful way. Extending our musical analogy for a moment longer; if we imagine that Monteverdi was actually engaged in the kind practice based PhD research that I have produced here, the new madrigal form that he composed would itself become subjected to analysis. Furthermore this analysis would undoubtedly tell us something not just about musical form but about how this musical form has been generated in relation to the medical

theories which provoked it. It might consider for instance an increased level of dissonance, a distinctive use of polyphony or the addition of new vocal parts and how these might be a response to and crucially a reflection of these ideas. This type of analysis might also engage the historical origins and current debates necessitated by the more traditional PhD thesis but it would have a completely different relationship to the 17th century conception of humors. This relationship between art practice and theory can be seen to generate a type of engagement with the object of enquiry that is quite distinctive, producing a type of enquiry and a form of knowledge that would otherwise be difficult (if not impossible) to realise.. The value of the practice remains paramount and autonomous whilst its explication within the thesis serves to promote new ways of thinking about the object and these new ways of thinking are not only themselves of interest but they might also go on to generate further practice and so on. This is what is meant by a dialogic relationship and this is how we can best imagine the research into the studio that has been produced here.

As an example we might consider the six images that make up one of the practice components of this research, three of which are illustrated in Fig.1.

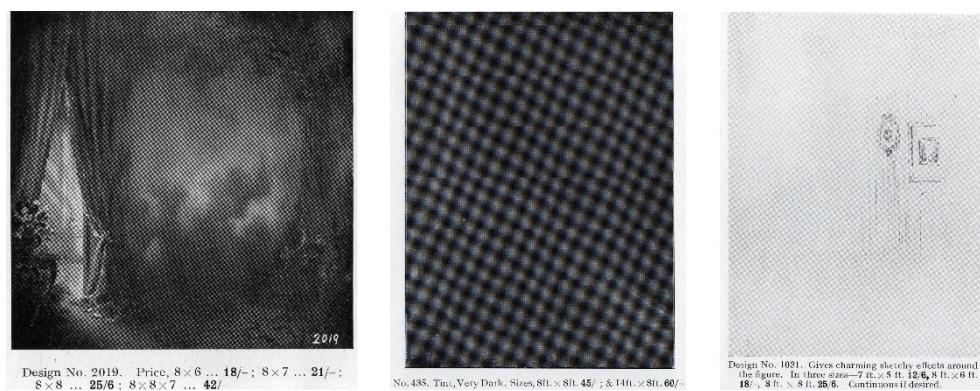


Figure 1: *Untitled* six framed pigment prints 16"x12" 2014

These works were made as a direct response to an early Kodak trade catalogue, leant to me by the proprietor of an historic portrait studio I happened to be photographing. The appropriation and subsequent presentation of images from this catalogue is an artistic act that might be contextualised as belonging to a well established tradition that starts with Duchamp's readymades and extends through Rauchenberg and Warhol to the picture generation of Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine and beyond to the diverse range of contemporary photographic practices that incorporate appropriated material. It is, in other words, a clearly artistic statement as opposed to an example of historical research.

The illustrations of backdrops in this catalogue seemed to suggest the Lacanian psychoanalytical theories that I had been researching picturing a relationship between these ideas and the studio space. The problem was that the images were already formed; the act of appropriation seemed too literal a translation, seeming to lack even the smallest amount of critical edge that might effectively align them with the majority of practices I have identified. My eventual decision to include the edges of the illustrations along with parts of the catalogues accompanying captions was partly an homage to certain paintings by Gerhardt Richter, where this occurs, and partly an attempt to continue a propensity in my ongoing practice (particularly that which makes use of appropriation) to include edges and seams that would conventionally be cropped out. The point here is that my decision making was aimed at the production of an effective and autonomous photographic art piece that whilst having been provoked through an engagement with a particular space and a set of ideas was now being formed using artistic criteria. Only when the piece, the framed set of six prints, was finished and displayed was it subjected to analysis. This analysis, rather than seeking to explain the initial thought process, as I have just laid out here, took the form of a speculative reading in which I have made connections between the finished pieces and the theoretical arguments within the thesis.

This analysis as you will recall forms a part of our previous chapter, albeit in an abridged form. You may also recall that the ideas that this reading began to consider were in fact quite distinct from the ideas that formed the generation of the work. The discussion, rather, proposed that there were certain ways in which we might further our theorising of the studio space ways that usefully incorporate the role that Lacan assigns to language as a fundamental constituent in the formation of desire. The photographic practice itself did not explicitly aim to provide this connection yet in being produced in response to an engagement with Lacanian thought and consequently being considered in similar terms it appeared to invite it. The consideration of the role of language that this practice precipitated formed a pertinent addition to the theoretical associations that had been engaged up to this point, indeed it seemed to provide a very useful way that they might be further understood. It is the nature of this generation of ideas through practical engagement that is important and it is this that I wish to leave you with as a concluding thought.

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