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PHOTOGRAPHY:
A medium for change

Cover 41/2, Design: Debra Livingston

This special addition, 'Photography: A medium for change', focuses on the capacity of photography to challenge a person's perception about the world. From capturing our surroundings to creating portraits that carry a voice for a social issue, photography has long shaped the way we see and remember things: it can bring injustices to the forefront, it can inspire and inform. The authors who have contributed to this issue have applied their research-led practice to document social and culturall issues that need to be discussed. Their approaches to photography vary, from the traditional capture to conceptual content. Overall, the authors use their creative practice to initiate a conversation about issues both here in Australia and abroad.

For the cover design, I chose a photograph from my series, 'What do you feel about the world atm?', produced as the COVID pandemic continues to persist in our environment. The sitter is a friend who I had asked to comment on the pandemic. He had found an old gas mask at his local Men's Shed and he chose to wear this for the portrait. My concept was to make the portrait look as 'homely' as possible—wearing a gas mask in a kitchen setting is a comment about the state of the pandemic world at the moment.

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Further information and the entry form are available at https://br4r.org.au/poetry-comp/

The Poetry Prize is proudly supported by the journal Social Alternatives.
BR4R is a volunteer organisation supporting refugees and asylum seekers.

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PHOTOGRAPHY: A MEDIUM FOR CHANGE

DEBRA LIVINGSTON AND AMY CARKEEK

The authors presented in this issue, ‘Photography: A medium for change’, are emerging voices of photographers addressing a range of social issues, from making a difference to people’s work–life relationship to interpreting the post-AIDS millennial rise of legitimacy for gay men. They show that the lens of photography can inform or challenge by interrogating social problems through the image.

A photograph can connect us to our past, reminding us of historical and recent events. It can bring to the forefront matters of concern about important cultural and social issues. It can also inspire people or change someone's view. It can promote change by bringing empowerment and liberation to advocate for furthering social justice.

A single image potentially has the power to change the minds of people on a global scale. One example is the historical image, The Terror of War, the Napalm Girl’, shot by Pulitzer Prize winner and Vietnamese photographer for the Associated Press, Nick Ut. The horrors of the Vietnam War as expressed through his photographic image of a ‘young girl fleeing her village after being torched by napalm dropped by a South Vietnamese Air Force was a transformative moment in a horrible conflict’ (Harris 2015). This image may have stopped the war:

> The ‘Napalm Girl’ photo added strength to the anti-war movement, and the use of napalm on civilian targets was outlawed by the UN less than ten years later, in 1980 (Westrick 2019).

While photographic images have a long history of bringing to the forefront social issues prevalent in our world, these days photographs can be copied and mass-distributed around the globe within seconds. For instance, we currently see images of the genocide in Ukraine, as well as the heroism of the Ukrainians in resisting the invasion, the same day as the events happened.

Both photo-journalists and photo-documentary photographers often submerge themselves in dramatic occurrences such as conflict, famine and weather events, however they differ in their approaches to photography:

> Both tell a story but photo-documentary can be many visual styles and the motivations of the photographers are various as opposed to photo-journalists where images are taken straight-from-the-hip, in that they are deemed to hold traditional values of truth and abide by a code of ethics. Photo-documentary on the other hand can be crafted to tell a story or narrate an experience. It is still a document that tells a story in a different way (Livingston 2021: 3).

This issue presents photographers documenting their research-led photographic practices, where they are attempting to distil through their images the turmoil and the beauty that surround us. Their photography is shaped by both traditional photo-documentary and photo-journalism fields as well as a modern discipline of conceptual photography, where photographic practice is developed around a pre-conceived idea. Conceptual photography is how photographers construct an abstract scholarly idea to deliver a successful narrative in a meaningful way. Referring to photo-documentary, Ryan states:

> Issues of documentary photography are addressed in relation to more conceptual photography; the efficacy of storytelling; and what makes an image evidentiary, objective, subjective, truthful or a tool for advocacy; as well as thoughts on whether these matters are currently moot, or more critical than ever (Ryan 2011).

In contemporary conceptual photo-documentary photographers use a range of differing photographic means to produce images which are both documentary and creative art. The articles and images in this issue will illustrate some of the ways that the camera lens of photography can inform or challenge by conveying social problems through the image.

In 'Even Our Dreams Are Fake: Suburban illusions and their gothic interventions', Amy Carkeek's questioning of how the 'illusory' American dream has infiltrated the Australian dream has inspired a series of images that explore the contradictions of this ideological facade. Her work draws upon the *gothic* as the theoretical lens, and the aesthetic from 1950s and 1970s American Kitsch with lurid colours to represent the contemporary neoliberal condition. According to Carkeek: 'the Suburban Gothic is a sub-genre of the literary and televisual American Gothic tradition that dramatises anxieties arising from the mass suburbanisation of America in the post-World War Two era' (Murphy 2009 in Carkeek 2022). She considers what is fantasy and what is fiction in the world's media of mass entertainment and how this affects consumers of the dream, saying: 'It is […] the story's strength and sophistication and the relationship between truth and fabrication that requires the viewer's unconscious attention'. In this space the viewer can imagine that this could be real and something to aspire to. That is, the long history of the credibility of photography lulls viewers consciously or unconsciously into believing that the image is a representation of the truth. Even Our Dreams Are Fake aims to illuminate such anomalies as the suburban 'irreconcilable world of dream and nightmare and past, present and future' (Carkeek 2022).

In her article, 'New Kinds of Archives' Kelly Hussey-Smith explores childhood trauma experienced in orphanages, children's Homes and out-of-home-care and how this has impacted the project participants through their disconnection from family heritage. The collaborative artwork and project discussed in 'New Kinds of Archives' specifically explores 'the relationship between state and institutional archives and narratives of the self for a small group of Australian care leavers' (Hussey-Smith 2022). Developed from several years of dialogue with care leavers Hussey-Smith collaborated with the project's participants, on narrative stories comprised of video works, photographs of objects, text and portraits. For the 'Lost Objects' series children in Homes had very few personal items; these humble items were likely to have been precious. Hussey-Smith's images not only recognise the importance of these objects but through the act of photographing, positions photography as a form of caring for histories and stories that escape the mainstream.

In Liz Hingley's article, 'Visualising the Nature of Care', the camera provides a positive experience for critical caregivers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hingley uses the camera as a therapeutic tool 'distinct from more traditional models and settings' for exhausted care staff (Hingley 2022). She examines the potential of environmental sensory engagement in a natural area of London and considers the value of 'visual touch', especially in times of social distancing. Hingley collaborated with hospitals and ecologists to generate new insights and interventions that could support the emotional and sensory needs of staff through photography and nature walks. The project draws upon therapeutic photography and anthropology. A series of images, either created by the participants or the author is interwoven with reflections of care workers on the experience.

In 'a Cuppa and a Yarn: Exploring Methodology', Jody Haines discusses the methodology of her practice-led research and how this informs her 'socially engaged' creative portraiture. She focuses on how her methodology can impact and drive her creative work. Haines's (2022) Indigenous principles of 'respect, care, listening, reciprocity, and

relationality' and 'yarning' become the focus of her methods, and she explains how their application to image making creates a closer and more intimate relationship with the sitter. She refers to her approach to her portraiture as an Indigenous feminist (new) materialism methodology, via 'a cuppa and a yarn'. The outcome of this practice-led research is a series of beautiful portraits in which you can see the connection between the photographer and the sitter.

In his article 'Not With a Bang But a Whimper', Ray Cook explores 'the post-AIDS, millennial rise of legitimacy for gay men' and how they are/were seen in a neoliberal capitalistic world. Using a conceptual narrative of images, Cook engages the idea of a clown to represent and critique gay life-style television shows. He documents himself in a theatre of 'metaphor and allegory to situate [the works] in a theatrical, propositional space': here he performs for the camera. He suggests that the lived problem of seeming gay legitimacy is far more complex than first realised and he confirms that his narrative of images are a personal journey. Cook writes: 'Like generations of gay image makers before me, I use theatrical, tableaux photography as a way to communicate more selectively to the community with whom I identified' (Cook 2022).

Adam Ferguson is an award winning photo-journalist/documentary photographer who travels world-wide, photographing global culture, conflict and social issues. In his journeys he photographed the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests in 2019 where millions of people turned up to protest. Ferguson (2022) said that 'Protesters operated in anonymity – wearing masks and helmets for safety – but equally to conceal their identity from state surveillance'. Whilst he photographed the protests for the press, he felt that the 'straight from the hip' images did not show the depth of feeling amongst the protesters. He then invited volunteers to pose in their normal protest attire in a studio environment. However, he found this was not successful as their protest paraphernalia that obscured their identity also inhibited the visual connectedness to the plight of the protester. Another approach was adopted, to hide the protesters' identities through selective lighting and poses. Ferguson (2022) writes: 'I'm eternally fascinated by what happens between the person behind the camera and the person in front of the camera—the exchange, the authorship, the transformation'.

Debra Livingston's creative photographic portraiture showcases a variety of sitters from over a seven year period. Livingston discusses the way her portraits come under the banner of 'Everyone has a story' either it is a constructed portrait or one of opportunity. She found that everyone has a story whether sad or happy. She considers whether conceptual portraits tell the same story as a candid or opportunistic portrait and how this translates or informs the audience. Livingston presents a variety of techniques for photographic portraiture and is now focusing on a new concept series by photographing people's response to 'How do You Feel About the World ATM?'.

Overall, in this issue's articles the photographers provide the reader with a glimpse into how photography can influence and change minds. Using a theoretical groundwork of exploration, research and experience, each author contributes a different social perspective of the world. Their creative works are socially engaged photographs that are crafted within a theoretical framework of photo-documentary.

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EVEN OUR DREAMS ARE FAKE: SUBURBAN ILLUSIONS AND THEIR GOTHIC INTERVENTIONS

AMY CARKEEK

Even Our Dreams Are Fake *(2012-2014) is a series of photographs that were motivated by what I perceived at the time as a progressively deteriorating Australian dream. While the US's cultural and consumer influence upon the Australian dream is apparent in a contemporary context, this practice-led research is concerned with examining the nostalgic ideals of a mid-twentieth century American dream and how this fantasy is able to persistently rework itself through the incongruities of an accelerating neoliberal present. This research explores the aspirational suburban lifestyle as a core conduit to the broader neoliberal American dream. In this article, I propose that by employing a specific mode of 1980s and 1990s Suburban Gothic and its distinct tone,* Even Our Dreams Are Fake *can aid a more meaningful insight into the paradoxes of the neoliberal American dream and our sustained individual and collective entanglement within it. To do so, I outline how mass entertainment media and imagery alongside nostalgia are able to persuade and influence. It is suggested that when used together with neoliberal narratives, they can leave audiences in denial about their power and intent. Following this, I discuss two important Suburban Gothic filmic texts and how their characteristics, devices, and tropes form the foundations for the suburban world constructed in* Even Our Dreams Are Fake.

keywords: Neoliberal American Dream, suburban dream, Suburban Gothic, consumer imagery, constructed photography.

While not knowing what the near future and our now present would hold, it was in 2012 and post the Global Financial Crisis of 2007-08 that I started to pay significant attention to the increasingly visible contradictions in Australia's egalitarian national narrative and to realise the likelihood that I would never achieve the Great Australian Dream of homeownership. Like many, this aspiration has been instilled in me since childhood – the suburban home being central to the idyllic Australian way of life, a symbol of security, individual virtue, and civility (Allon 2008: 65-67). Although I comprehended that the Australian dream was problematic, I found I conflictingly desired it all the same. However, rather than identify the parallels between a mid-twentieth or early twenty-first century US and Australia and our shared economic and consumer histories, I was more interested in investigating how the ideological foundation of a supposedly democratic and sentimentally past American dream has been able to perpetuate and govern so categorically. In better understanding the mechanisms employed, I felt I could gain a deeper understanding into the contemporary neoliberal American condition, and in turn, what I saw as Australia's own diminishing situation. This impulse framed my practice-led research and formed the foundations for the photographic series *Even Our Dreams Are Fake* (2012-14), a body of work that employs a particular mode of 1980s and 1990s' Suburban Gothic so as to examine the role of mass entertainment images (or what I define as consumer images) and nostalgia that exist in the construction and perseverance of the neoliberal American dream through its core conduit: the serene suburban home and its attendant lifestyle.

Defining the American Dream and Neoliberalism

The most recent, and still current, phase of capitalism in liberal countries such as the US and Australia is known as neoliberalism. The core democratic and political values of the American dream are fixed in the possibility of individual achievement and equal

opportunities for all citizens to prosper, to be made possible through the 'free markets' of capitalism (Chomsky et al. 2017). To assist capitalism in achieving this, through the 20th century governments had introduced more market regulation and welfare services to citizens. However, in the early 1980s this trend began to be reversed, ushering in neoliberalism (Harvey 2005).

Neoliberalism is characterised as an extension of competitive markets into all areas of life, including the economy, politics, and society (Springer et al. 2016: 2). It comprises rhetoric and ideologies of competitive market forces, and it 'operates through a range of practices and processes that combine social, cultural, and economic domains to constitute new spaces and subjects' (Springer et al. 2016: 57). It is this idea of financial gain and persistent growth as fundamental to, and interwoven through, culture and society that is of specific interest to this research. The 1980s are also of interest to my research as they are fundamental to neoliberalism's ability to penetrate all facets of life.

Then US President Ronald Reagan and UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher fostered neoliberalism through the capitalist market by deregulating global free-trade and encouraging radical individualism (Blake and Monnet 2017: 4-6). It is in this collision of neoliberalism, egalitarian ideals, and the governing elite, that the supposed meritocratic values of the American dream become hijacked. According to US philosopher Noam Chomsky, the 1980s drove policies that enriched the already wealthy, while allowing the rest of society to suffer (Chomsky et al. 2017: 51-54). Further to this, American literature and culture scholar Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet argues that it is the imperial narrative and the US's national mythology of infinite growth – geographically, politically, and economically – that have, over time, allowed such neoliberal narratives and ideals to become normalised. Such values, she suggests, have now become glamorised, creating an even narrower and undisputed ideological framework for the contemporary neoliberal American dream (Monnet 2017: 6:06).

Defining the Suburban Gothic

The Suburban Gothic is a sub-genre of the literary and televisual American Gothic tradition that dramatises anxieties arising from the mass suburbanisation of America in the post-World War Two era. It refers to narratives situated within the suburban setting and employs suburban concerns and protagonists. American horror and popular culture scholar Bernice Murphy (2009) classifies two key concerns of suburban critics and the Suburban Gothic: (1) the deterioration of the physical environment due to mass development and, in more recent times, the questioning of its sustainability – both economically and environmentally; and (2) the mental state of those who live within these fabricated environments. Central to both trepidations is the family home, which now replaces the European Gothic's haunted castle as the station of terror. The Suburban Gothic examines the ramifications of achieving the aspirational suburban lifestyle, as its oblivious occupants are apparently turned into mindless, materialistic, and unhappy robots, while they seek social and economic advancement at all costs (Murphy 2009: 74-198). Thus, essential to the Suburban Gothic's representation of home as idyllic, calm, and safe is the juxtaposition of family secrets and acts of the uncanny (Murphy 2009: 2-3). The Suburban Gothic therefore scrutinises not only the economic, political, and social occurrences that construct and dominate the suburbs, but also the psychological repercussions on those who achieve the dream and occupy the suburban milieu. As a method of inquiry, what the Suburban Gothic offers early twenty-first century Western society is a vehicle that examines that which underpins the suburbs' surface and the recurring concerns of the American suburban middle-class.

Constructing the Myth: Neoliberal Elites, Fantasy as Reality and Nostalgia

In his overview of those responsible for driving the myth of an industrialised American dream into the neoliberal present, American journalist and author Chris Hedges (2009)

isolates the neoliberal elite (government and corporate) as responsible. He argues that the American people have been misguided, and even lied to, by those who are elected to serve them, because the government has destroyed the financial system and the manufacturing sector, and corrupted democracy. Hedges suggests Americans are desperate to reinstate the promise of an industrialised future and the illusion of the American dream, or what he calls a return to the bubble economy. He claims that such motivations offer nothing but fantasies of infinite wealth, growth, and mobility, and that the American public are therefore encouraged to deny the reality of the present as they are fed unrelenting fabrications and ironies on how to achieve such an impossible illusion (Hedges 2009: 142-144). Central to Hedges' argument and the ways in which such neoliberal narratives are embedded in the American psyche is through visual representations of lifestyle and access and the narrative that happiness and success can be achieved through the consumption of products and appearances (Hedges 2009: 23-27). Key to the continued flow of commodified representations is the influence of monopolised technology and digital media companies, advertising, Hollywood cinema, and the television and screen (Hedges 2009: 168-169).

To contextualise how mass entertainment media can influence and persuade, American psychologist Karen E. Dill-Shackleford (2012-2016) says that we learn socially through our exposure to such media and its imagery; however, she argues we are habitually in denial about this fact, which enables a higher level of manipulation to occur (Dill-Shackleford 2016: 71). Dill-Shackleford also maintains that we learn about others through the mediation of represented social interactions, reasoning that the use of social storytelling in media can and does influence behaviour toward the specific social group depicted (Dill and Burgess 2012: 197). This prompting can occur because storytelling is a way to share experiences and values, but since we generally understand mass entertainment as fiction, individuals and the broader society do not consider these messages to be manipulative of them personally (Dill and Burgess 2012: 79). According to Dill-Shackleford, this deception is achieved through the notion of fantasy, and she argues that we generally make two basic errors of judgement in our consumption of mass entertainment: (1) believing that fantasy stories in no way shape our realities; and (2) believing that media's reason for being is to entertain us rather than persuade us (Dill-Shackleford 2016: 7).

Dill-Shackleford's key proposition is that individuals consciously believe they understand the distinction between fantasy and fiction and that entertainment cannot change their real-world thoughts and behaviours because they trust that only reality, and not fantasy, can affect them (Dill and Burgess 2012: 199). This blurring, and the space of the in-between, is where the ability to induce lies. As Dill-Shackleford points out, 'the reality of a fictional story is not whether it is a fantasy or a fiction; it is whether it is believable and attractive' (Dill-Shackleford 2016: 10). It is therefore the story's strength and sophistication and the relationship between truth and fabrication that requires the viewer's unconscious attention. Consequently, this space of the in-between is where audiences can start to imagine the possibility of a given mediated social situation or character as actually being 'real' (Dill-Shackleford 2016: 10). This liminal space and its duality, as well as its inherent contradictions, are central to my work, as it embodies desires, tensions, and oppositions – within both the self and the broader context of society – and it reflects our current and contemporary anxieties of progress and change (Lloyd-Smith 2004: 5-6).

Also important is the ability for consumer images to influence the idealised lifestyle, values, and behaviours of the neoliberal American dream. Accordingly, I employ photography – a medium that is known for constructing artifice and desire through entertainment and advertising yet, paradoxically, is embedded in a (contested) historical discourse of mirroring 'reality' and representations of 'truth' (Sontag [1977] 2008; Tagg [1988] 1993). While audiences know the photographic representation is fictional, they

nevertheless come to consider it believable, either consciously or unconsciously, as they are drawn into an enticing world that is full of promise. This influential power of the photographic and its aptitude to fabricate fantasy enables it to formulate illusions while simultaneously exposing the medium's function in their creation.

In his research into the role of popular media and the collective myth of a post-World War Two American suburban ideal, American popular media scholar David R. Coon (2013) examines private and collective nostalgia and the significant role that television and media play in its creation and visualisation. History, memory, and nostalgia 'all work to construct and reconstruct a past in a way that helps us make meaning in the present' (Coon 2013: 40). Coon specifically recognises that the rapid pace of the modern and post-industrialised world has caused us to be individually and collectively more nostalgic for a previous time that seems slower and simpler in all aspects. At the heart of manufacturing nostalgia for the utopian ideals of the suburbs is the image and its surface level references to the past (Coon 2013: 39-45). Coon clarifies that in critiquing nostalgia, iconic American films such as *The Truman Show* (Weir 1998) and *Pleasantville* (Ross 1998) draw attention to the production of the suburban veneer by using the surface image as a vehicle to obscure the reality that lies beneath it. Thus, they highlight the boundaries between reality and artifice. What the films demonstrate, Coon argues, is 'how our knowledge of the past is actually a carefully constructed interpretation of reality' (Coon 2013: 53). As a result, these films, and others like them, explore the manipulative potential for nostalgia as fabricated through consumer images in television and other mass entertainment media.

Clarifying how nostalgia can reduce the complexities of the past to a surface image, American philosopher Fredric Jameson (1988, 1991) explains that nostalgia is significant to postmodernity and that as we have become further removed from an experience or a specific period through temporality, we often long to experience the 'idea' of that moment or period. Conversely, this habitually entails a select recollection, an idyllic and glorified fantasy. According to Jameson, nostalgia has seeped into popular culture, continually reducing the actuality of a situation or moment in favour of an idealised representation. The postmodern plagiarises plots and reinvents the past, reducing it to a 'feel' and a 'look' – 'a decorative overlay' (Jameson 1991: 9-10). This aesthetic can no doubt only be created from the plethora of already existing commodified visual representations circulating in popular culture. Jameson determines that 'all we can really do is "represent" our ideas and cultural stereotypes about the past' (Jameson 1988: 20), thus creating a flattened, ambiguous, and diminished version of that specific preceding time. This is what Jameson refers to as the 'disappearance of history and the simulacrum of the past, the reduction to the present' (Baumbach et al. 2016: 145). Thus, my photographic series *Even Our Dreams Are Fake* employs nostalgia as a core strategy to expose how the reduced and overly sentimental visual narratives of a past suburban ideal are skewed. This is achieved through various devices and juxtapositions, including kitsch, the found commodity object, garish colours, suburban rituals, and inferences to mawkish childhood behaviours and their longing.

Nostalgia and Contradiction in the Suburban Gothic

Comparably, yet incongruously, the use of the past is one of the Suburban Gothic's core conventions, acting as a disruptive device used to conjure the anxiety of repressed and historical events to return and haunt the present. The Suburban Gothic employs nostalgia as a principal characteristic, as the suburban dream's existence is not only dependent upon it but is the foundation of its conception (Murphy 2009: 136). However, referencing the past can and does conflict with one's nostalgia as this encounter occurs through the juxtaposition of a sentimental longing or wistful affection for a previous period and proposes a possibly frightening and unknown future (Hogle 2002: 4). Therefore, in *Even Our Dreams Are Fake* I use nostalgia as a core device to

not only lure the viewer into my disturbed yet melancholic suburban world, but to then subject them to the fraught nature of their own desires while exposing the dualism of the past/present, fantasy/reality resistance.

Contradictions and a 1980s America

To understand the significance of this postmodern era of Suburban Gothic inquiry, the disillusionment in early 1980s American culture must be clarified. Due to the rise of conflicts in Americans everyday reality, the 1980s saw questions emerge about burgeoning neoliberal ideals. The Suburban Gothic of this time therefore witnessed new plots and narrative devices emerge as fraught relationships between parents and children appeared, and the notion of family values projected a much darker outlook (Murphy 2009: 136). This generation came of age trusting, as those before them did, in unstoppable economic progress. Being fed the propaganda of the suburban dream and a materialistic life that would generate happiness, these contemporaries would be the first to face the prospect of doing worse than did their parents (Murphy 2009: 111). The 1980s are therefore significant to the Suburban Gothic as they revealed, in contrast to Reagan's political message, that the suburban dream may not be an achievable possibility for the next aspiring middle-class generation. Similar parallels can be made today, as such concerns continue to be evidenced in a post-Trump America and as the economic and social divide widens not only in the US but also increasingly here in Australia. At the same time, the rhetoric conveyed in contemporary Western society conflictingly maintains that the suburban dream and its excessive lifestyle is an entitlement and achievable aspiration for all (Das 2017).

1980s and 1990s Suburban Gothic Films

In defining the key components to the suburban dream's construction, Murphy identifies four aspects as being crucial: television, advertising/entertainment, the home, and nostalgia. In turn, she explains that the Suburban Gothic employs these mechanisms as core methods to examine their unscrupulous intent (Murphy 2009: 99). In the following section, two of these core mechanisms – (1) the home as a space of conformity, consumption, entrapment and psychological turmoil; and (2) nostalgia as a device to manufacture and drive the desire for the dream – alongside subtle expressions in tone, are analysed in Steven Spielberg's *Poltergeist* (1982) and Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* (1991). Following this, I discuss the works in *Even Our Dreams Are Fake* and the use of such Suburban Gothic characteristics.

In *Poltergeist*, the suburban home and its entrapment are core to the film's narrative, as is the use of nostalgia and the rhetoric of conservative family values. Such conformity, materialistic enslavement, and fear of external threats are scrutinised through the Freeling family and an evil supernatural invasion of the home. American critical theorist Douglas Kellner (1996) argues that *Poltergeist* explores the lifestyle of the new affluent suburban middle-class and presents 'symbolic projections of insecurities and fears' (Kellner 1996: 220). He also suggests that the film is an example of the allegorical anxieties concerning the deteriorating conditions for the middle-classes under a conservative Reagan government. Kellner asserts that *Poltergeist* addresses the main economic pressure of the 1980s and the American dream's principal aspiration – specifically, the fear of maintaining and losing the family home, as well as the fear of falling from the affluent middle-class into the lower-class bracket (Kellner 1996: 217-226). Drawing our attention to the materialistic entrapment of the home and the Freeling family's conformity to the burgeoning suburbs, Kellner acknowledges the family's large split-level house, omnipresent multichannel televisions, electronic gadgets, bountiful toys and a 'treasure house of commodities for every conceivable purpose' (Kellner 1996: 221). Moreover, by showing good families being attacked by supernatural monsters, or the 'other', Kellner maintains that *Poltergeist* acts as

a metaphorical and ideological symbol of the nuclear middle-class family and its portrayal as the most viable institution in the suburban milieu (Kellner 1996: 219-221). However, American film scholar Murray Leeder (2008) disagrees, disclosing several cracks in this perfect veneer that undermine and satirise the conservative nuclear family. Instead, Leeder observes a cynical tone in the film that represents the façade of the perfect family as employed to critique such social expectations (Leeder 2008: 12-13). Thus, through individual and collective nostalgia the Freelings come to represent both the conservative ideals of Reagan's promised nuclear family, while also revealing the contradictions of this nostalgic illusion.

In *Edward Scissorhands*, we witness a different kind of examination of anxiety within the home as well as the use of nostalgia as a contrary device. The film is a comedic tragedy that overlays a fantasy vision of suburbia upon a Gothic fairy-tale. The setting of the film is a quintessential suburban cul-de-sac, a sentimental and appropriated past America. In contrast, at the end of the street sits a medieval style Gothic mansion. Here, we meet Edward, a Frankensteinian creation who awaits his impossible human transformation, as protagonist Peg happens upon him while selling Avon products door to door (Markley 2007: 278-282). In his analysis of the film, English literature scholar Robert Markley (2007) suggests that the suburbia of *Scissorhands* is a 'superficial surface, an idyll which lacks depth and substance as it has no history and engenders no self-analysis' (Markley 2007: 282). It is in this strange veneer of the glib and surreal suburbs that we observe the social deterioration of its inhabitants through the mistreatment of Edward as Other. This is not explored through Gothic horror or the supernatural but rather by employing Edward as a trope to reveal the suburbanites' own monstrosity, caused by their embrace of a superficial suburban world (Markley 2007: 290).

What makes *Scissorhands'* entrapment of the home unique when compared to other Suburban Gothic films is the underlying psychological disconnect of those who occupy the family household, and the darkly comedic yet melancholic tone used to express this. Throughout the film, Peg and her husband Bill appear mentally detached from their environment. The characters' preoccupation is always with the home and the performance of its rituals and gestures: family dinners and clichéd conversations, weekend barbecues, fatherly chats and maintenance of the lawns and hedges (Markley 2007: 288). *Scissorhands* is thus a Suburban Gothic text, a mode that critically investigates, through fictional narrative, nostalgia, and allegory, the growing concerns of a politically accelerating and socially declining late 1980s and early 1990s America.

Even Our Dreams Are Fake

In *Even Our Dreams Are Fake*, I deliberately construct a recognisable yet anywhere suburban world that is a pastiche of nostalgic suburban surfaces. Through utilising the Suburban Gothic, I aim to create a contrast between the idealised past and its early stages of capitalism, and the present – a hollow and rapacious neoliberal illusion. The ideological stronghold of the suburbs is exposed through the juxtaposition of selected iconic elements. Specifically, it is the Suburban Gothic's examination of the emotions being evoked by the fear of danger coming from within the home (the anxiety caused by striving for and maintaining the suburban façade) and the home as a site of conflicting states of dream and nightmare that enable my examination of this decaying surface and, in turn, the declining mental state of those inhabiting this space of the in-between.

In the works, each potentially joyful suburban narrative and ritual is distorted, happily recognisable in its depiction, yet unhinged and futile in its failed realisation. The series aims to employ a feeling of nostalgic optimism and playfulness before a slow sense of deflation and emptiness emerges. The tension this juxtaposition evokes

is intended to produce a sense of the uncanny, as the desired suburban narrative loses its shine, leaving a sense of dishonesty and discontent in the promises such elements convey. This process seeks to create a conflict within the work that focuses on the psychological manifestations within this staged setting, while also unsettling the viewer's understanding of their own entangled role in a much larger flawed and weakening system. An example of how this is achieved is through distorting the idyllic and familiar. Commodity objects, suburban consumer behaviours and their neoliberal values are all scrutinised through a pastiche of past surfaces: the now obsolete and useless Apple iPod; a melting face liquidating from underneath a platinum blonde wig; and the welcoming of nature and its subsequent fumigation. These associations aim to disclose a strangely serene, yet progressively rupturing, suburban setting. The surreal moments act as fragmented narratives that intend to provoke criticality about the ease with which one can unknowingly be enslaved into maintaining the suburban veneer and the psychological toll that this takes on those who strive for and occupy this environment.

To simulate the sentimental feeling of a past suburbia that is endlessly reworked and appropriated throughout postmodern and present-day society, I ascribed the language of a 1950s and 1970s American suburban kitsch aesthetic. By manipulating a pastiche of kitsch and nostalgic surfaces and their values, I sought to create an unnerving juxtaposition that emphasises the incongruity of the present-day neoliberal American dream. Utilising the sweet and sentimental exterior of kitsch and exploiting its surface exposes that inherent in its assumed naiveté is its ability to control the masses and to reduce more complex understandings of culture to mass-produced commodities within the neoliberal capitalist system. This incongruity is expressed in *Nature's Golden Goodness* (2014) as it engages the past and iconic ritual of displaying a birdbath to invite not only nature, but also other suburban inhabitants, to admire one's well-kept façade. Instead of native birds, the readymade juxtaposition depicts cute ducklings who are not bathing in water, but rather in Kellogg's cornflakes. The affectionate nature of the ducklings connotes the love for adorable childhood pets and defines one of the core characteristics of kitsch – cuteness and society's perversion to fetishise its surface pleasure (Harris 2001: 3-4). While the ducklings' uncanny double draws attention, the deformed two-headed 'animal thing' invites the audience to not only pity the anthropomorphised and malformed but also to deliberate that in their failing cuteness, they represent the endless manufacturing of romanticised childhood images and their desire.

Lurid colours are assigned in the works as they are intentionally indicative of 1970s Tupperware commercials, or of then fashionable kitchen appliance advertisements. It is intended that the colours playfully attract the audience and nostalgically reference a humbler period when newly attainable brilliant colours were desired in the home. Also kitsch in nature, the monochrome palette is utilised to exaggerate and flatten the past and to reinvent it within the present – a reduced, idealised, and pleasing surface that is easily consumed – before the certainty of its contents and their newly ascribed meanings are realised. The series' colourful monochromatic surface is used as both a reference to the artificiality of the mid-twentieth century consumer façade and of the consumer's desire to achieve and maintain it.

Finally, to investigate the implicit economic privilege and inherent anxieties of the suburbs' materialism, my work also enlists the iconic television. In a contemporary context, such technology is now a sign of a globally networked communication system. In the present, we understand that with such commodities come spectres of the external world – neoliberal monsters who enter our homes and survey our lives (Edwards 2017: 81). Conflictingly, it is the manufactured fantasy of the suburban milieu and our enslavement to upgrading the home as a signifier of middle-class affluence

that has enabled such an invasion to occur. In *Untitled # 5* (2012) a 1979 Sony Trinitron television floats suspended in a magenta oval void. The screen sparkles with shimmering tinsel curtains – an allegory for the optimistic and aspirational images that it relentlessly projects into the home. Likewise, the repetitive pattern suggests the artifice of the television image and the reality of the static white noise that invades the domestic space. Similarly, this dazzling illusion can act as a hypnotic enticement while external observations take place, extracting aspects of the interior and its occupants through a familiar yet uncanny and all-seeing device.

As discussed in this paper, I suggest that through returning to a specific 1980s and early 1990s Suburban Gothic, its distinct tone and methods of interrogation, we may find insight into the contemporary neoliberal condition. Through the Suburban Gothic films analysed in this article I have sought to better understand the conflicts that lie beneath the surface of the American façade and the significance of the 1980s neoliberal turn. In the process, I have discovered that in the suburbs the irreconcilable worlds of dream and nightmare and past, present, and future, interrelate with and are dependent upon each other. *Even Our Dreams Are Fake* aims to illuminate such anomalies as well as expose the authority of the consumer image and the narratives it conveys, revealing that its authority is enabled precisely because we refute such influence. I have suggested that as long as the governing neoliberal elite project such embellished images into our homes (while simultaneously extracting others), and we continue to deny the consequences of our desires, nostalgia for the suburban fantasy and the illusion of a past and sustainable American dream – both in the US and Australia – will persist, becoming ever more volatile and unstable.

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Dr. Amy Carkeek is a Meanjin (Brisbane) based visual artist whose practice-led research focuses on commodified images and objects in popular culture and their role in manufacturing neoliberal narratives and values that contribute to methods of control. Her practice is concerned with outdated domestic commodities in the form of readymade and found objects and the physical interference with their surface or function. Carkeek seeks to interrogate the objects past life and worth through the suburban gothic, nostalgia, and kitsch – so as to explore the incongruous nature of the neoliberal dream and the rituals of the suburban space and home. Carkeek is a lecturer in the Bachelor of Visual Art and the head of the Photography Major at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University.

Amy Carkeek, Untitled # 1, 2012,
Archival inkjet print 86.5 x 60cm.

Amy Carkeek, Untitled # 2, 2012,
Archival inkjet print 86.5 x 60cm.

Amy Carkeek, Untitled # 3, 2012,
Archival inkjet print 86.5 x 60cm.

Amy Carkeek, Untitled # 4, 2012,
Archival inkjet print 86.5 x 60cm.

Amy Carkeek, Untitled # 5, 2012,
Archival inkjet print 86.5 x 60cm.

Amy Carkeek,'Darling, Why Don't you Play With Your iPuppets?' 2014, Archival inkjet print, 86.5 x 60cm.

Refereed Article

NEW KINDS OF ARCHIVES: CARE LEAVERS, STATE ARCHIVES AND NARRATIVES OF THE SELF

KELLY HUSSEY-SMITH

*This paper explores the relationship between state archives and trauma for a small group of Australian care leavers by outlining the development of a collaborative artwork (*apart & a part *2017) made with six individuals who spent time in institutional care in Australia in the latter half of the twentieth century.*

It is estimated that during this time over 500,000 children grew up in or spent time in institutional care in Australia. For many of those care leavers, their experience was marked by longing, loss, and displacement, and as a result, many have inconsistent or non-existent records of their heritage, family, and early life experiences. Sequences of events are often missing due to a lack of information, the withholding of information by authorities and institutions, or the impacts of trauma and grief on the individual. The archives that do exist are often bureaucratic and impersonal. The ontological impulse to address these gaps in narrative leads many care leavers to become 'archivists of the self'.

Developed from several years of collaborative dialogue with care leavers, apart & a part *(2017) creates an expanded archive of visual responses and narrative fragments that address the felt experiences often absent from institutional records and historical accounts. This paper proposes that communities that have experienced trauma require new kinds of archives that make space for, and give form to, affective languages and experiences. In this 'archive of feelings', as queer feminist theorist Ann Cvetkovich (2003) puts it, trauma knowledge can be expressed on its own terms. Building on this, the paper proposes that care leavers require new kinds of archives that centre their knowledges and experiences beyond the authority of state and institutional archives.*

keywords: Archives, trauma, art, institutional care, photography, collaboration.

Introduction

Since 1999, a number of state and national inquiries and commissions have confirmed the widespread abuse and neglect of children in institutional and out-of-home-care in Australia in the twentieth century, and the systemic failures to adequately report on and intervene in this abuse (Commonwealth of Australia 2004, 2017). In this paper, I refer to the estimated 500,000 individuals who 'experienced care in an orphanage, Home[1], or other form of out-of-home-care during the last century' in Australia as care leavers[2] (Commonwealth of Australia 2004: xv)[3].

For many care leavers, the experience of out-of-home care was marked by longing, loss, and displacement, and as a result many individuals were harmed by this early life experience and have carried the impacts of trauma into adult life (Penglase 2005; Hil and Branigan 2010; Commonwealth of Australia 2004). For many people who spent time in institutional and out-of-home care as children, state and institutional archives are some of the only records of their early life and heritage. In this article, I explore the relationship between state and institutional archives and narratives of the self for a small group of Australian care leavers through the collaborative artwork—*apart & a part*—a project which I co-developed as part of my doctoral research with six individuals who spent time in institutional and out-of-home care in Australia in the twentieth century[4].

There are many reasons why children were placed in care and in many cases, the details of why children ended up in institutions or foster Homes are unknown or unclear. The scope of this article is not broad enough to adequately explore the social, political and moral contexts that led to so many children in Australia spending time in out-of-home care, but it is widely accepted that children who were removed from their families or handed over to the state (due to discrimination, moral judgments, illness, marriage status, stigma, safety, lack of support, poverty, lack of a welfare state, parental death, violence and abuse at home and racial, class and gender discrimination, or a combination thereof) were left disconnected from their heritage (Swain and Howe 2005; Penglase 2005; Commonwealth of Australia 2004). Care leaver and researcher Joanna Penglase (2005: 66-101) suggests that because most children in out-of-home-care had family on the outside, they were 'orphans of the living'.

Many care leavers have inconsistent or non-existent records of their heritage, family, and early life experiences (Murphy 2010; Commonwealth of Australia 2004). Sequences of events are often missing due to a lack of information, the withholding of information by authorities and institutions, or the impacts of trauma and grief. This disconnection is compounded by the gaping holes in record-keeping (due to inadequate record-keeping, and records that were lost, damaged, or withheld); gaps that continue to be felt by care leavers throughout their lives. The care leaver archives that do exist are often bureaucratic and impersonal and narrate lived experience through institutional perspectives and bureaucracies. This bureaucratic memory disconnects people from their experiences, making it more difficult to form narratives of the self.

Standardised clothing and haircuts, strict routines and a life recorded as a 'case' file all contributed to children feeling like 'an object in an administrative machine' (Murphy 2010: 305). These absences in the care leaver archive—of family histories, significant objects, stories, photographs, and shared memories—demonstrate how these institutional archival practices contribute to systems of exclusion, dehumanisation, and trauma. In an attempt to remove the traces of their previous life, it was not uncommon for children to be addressed by a number or intentionally separated from their siblings (Murphy 2010: 305). As practices of dehumanisation and disconnection, the impersonal nature of the institution and the functional language of bureaucracy alienated the child from relational life. When an individual lacks a guardian to the story of their life, or the guardian is bureaucratic and institutional, the impacts can range from loss and grief to 'genealogical bewilderment' (Sheedy in Penglase 2005: 321).

It is now widely accepted that many children in out-of-home care were abused physically, emotionally, medically, sexually, and spiritually, deprived of love and dehumanised (Commonwealth of Australia 2014, 2004; Murphy 2010). Recent Senate reports and inquiries suggest that this behaviour was systemic in the institutions and government departments that cared for children (McClellan 2015; Hawkins and Briggs 1997). In their research with care leavers in Australia, Shurlee Swain, Leonie Sheedy and Cate O'Neill (2012) argue that lifting the cultural silence around oppressive histories is essential to achieving justice for care leavers. They state:

> Before the enquiries and the subsequent apologies, [care leavers] were confronted by a cultural silence which denied them the language, concepts, and accepted narratives within which to construct and narrate their own experiences.Their stories did not 'fit in' with the narratives in the public domain. Their memories were outside discourse (Swain et al. 2012: 25).

The ontological impulse to address the gaps and silences in their collective histories and personal narratives led many care leavers to become what historian John Murphy (2010: 302) calls 'archivists of the self'. These practices of narrative recovery and community building have led to extraordinary care leaver activism producing outcomes such as advocacy networks, targeted social services, policy changes, reparations, care-leaver communities, find and connect services, national apologies and truth-telling initiatives such as the *Forgotten Australians Senate Inquiry* and the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*.

While initiatives such as Royal Commissions and Senate Inquiries have been tremendously important in drawing attention to the abuse and neglect that took place in children's homes in Australia, these forms of inquiry are generally focused on the retelling of traumatic experiences in a conventional or unnuanced form. As a result, they also tend to frame this violence as 'historical' rather than as a continuum of ongoing impacts that linger in the present. In contrast, this paper presents a series of art works co-developed with care leavers to address the gaps in the archiving of these experiences, specifically the implicit affective dimensions that continue to manifest in daily life.[5]

Arising from six years of collaborative dialogue, the works in *apart & a part* aimed to visualise how the institutional or 'care' experience has manifested in the lives of care leavers, and how this experience lingers in adult life. By focusing on the ongoing dimensions of trauma, *apart & a part* (2017) explored how project participants navigated everyday encounters with their past and how these insights and subsequent artworks might constitute 'new kinds of archives' (Cvetkovich 2003). Through this project I proposed that complex narrative understandings can be extrapolated from quotidian experiences, despite the propensity for these associations to be overlooked in trauma representations. Locating and interpreting the affective dimensions of trauma, memory, loss and the unobtainable archive allowed us to explore the ongoing, affective impacts of these practices and experiences on Australian care leavers. In this paper I will focus on three artworks and collaborations from the larger series of works in *apart & a part*.[6]

The artworks in *apart & a part* create an expanded archive of visual responses and narrative fragments that address the felt experiences often absent from institutional records and historical accounts. Drawing on queer feminist theorist Ann Cvetkovich's (2003) proposal that communities whose stories intersect with trauma require new kinds of archives that give form to affective languages and experiences, the photographic and video works explore how care leavers navigate everyday encounters with their past. By privileging care leaver knowledge and framing trauma as a continuum rather than an event, we explored how these experiences might be expressed beyond the rigidity of the state's archival regimes and legal dialectics, towards the knowledge that trauma cultures produce.

Trauma and The Archive

The cohesive integration of archives into political life obscures the fact that archives are not so much authoritative markers of history as they are evidence of power and control (Derrida 1996; Azoulay 2019). In *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* political theorist Ariella Aïsha Azoulay (2019) argues that state and institutional archives claim temporal authority by relegating violence and abuse to a historical 'past'. As extensions of broader ideological structures that enable and naturalise violent practices of removal, displacement and exclusion, archives do not tend to foreground the conditions of their production (Azoulay 2019: 168). Relegating violence to 'the past' denies the role that archives and documents have played in practices of disconnection and removal, and how the archive itself emerged as an imperial practice. In line with Jacques Derrida's (1996) analysis of the connection between control of the archive and power, Azoulay

(2019: 171) positions state and institutional archives as regimes of power that actively 'shape worlds' rather than simply representing them—proposing that archives are as much evidence of ongoing struggles and resistance as they are of hidden violence (Azoulay 2019: 43). Such a reading reframes archives from representations of established history to an extension of the imperial logic that enables forms of exclusion, removal, and enslavement.

In the course of seeking justice, care leaver advocacy movements have framed the archive (specifically the 'case file') as an extension of harmful and dehumanising government policies and social attitudes. The 2004 Senate Committee Report on *The Forgotten Australians* dedicated an entire chapter to 'Identity and Records', outlining the significant obstacles to obtaining personal records that helped care leavers create narratives of the self (Commonwealth of Australia 2004: 253–86). It detailed cases of the withholding of information; the return of confronting documents without access to counselling or support; a lack of empathy for those trying to access significant documents; absent or lost records; incorrect records; and some care leavers being forced to 'grovel for information' at the very institutions where they had been abused (Mead in Commonwealth of Australia 2004: 258). For many care leavers, being denied access to the archive—the records and documents that report on their early life—highlights the ongoing violence and trauma of growing up in state or out-of-home care, and how the authority of state, social and religious institutions is exercised through the archive.

Just as the camera shutter captures a limited amount of information by slicing a moment from its context, Azoulay observes that imperial technologies such as the archive operate as active agents in the process of separating people from their contexts (2019: xvi). The perceived neutrality of the archive presents history as fixed and naturalises the disconnection of people from their worlds (Azoulay 2019: 5-7)—a process Azoulay describes as the 'imperial shutter' (2019: 6). Despite the overwhelming evidence of children being harmed in institutional care in Australia, the case files and archives that document this time are usually silent on this issue. As both guardians of the archive and of the children, this conflict of interest for state and religious institutions enabled the conditions that allowed children in out-of-home care to be harmed.

When care leavers would apply to view their files, they would often receive heavily redacted documents devoid of meaningful content, and no evidence of neglect or harm. Most of the government files care leavers shared with me contained little more than the whereabouts of each child: when a child entered and exited the Home, hospital visits, school attendance, family stays, or work experience (often code for labour with no remuneration).[7] In many cases individuals had waited months or even years for their files only to find that they were heavily redacted and contained little information about their early life. This institutional refusal to view lived experience as anything other than pragmatic is demonstrative of how non-stakeholders document lived experience. Eventually these gaps become facts that speak to the cultural silences around care leaver histories.

As Azoulay (2019: 205) points out, when the state is both the producer and the guardian of the information in the archive these records 'create the reality that they purport to capture', leaving individual care leavers to authenticate their experience against the official record. This highlights the potential trauma that care leavers face when entering and accessing state, religious and institutional archives as part of constructing narratives of the self. As such, highlighting the perceived authority of state archives in the interest of enabling collective and personal narratives to emerge has been a core motivation of care leaver advocacy movements.

Narratives of the Self and New Kinds of Archives

Ontological practices of sense making, memory and narrative are intrinsic to creating narratives of the self (Atkinson 2002; Somers 1994; Carr 1986, see also Murphy 2010). For many care leavers, the gaps and silences in their personal archives have a significant impact on their sense of self. Sociologist Margaret Somers (1994: 614) positions narrative as ontologically significant, stating that 'social life is itself storied and … narrative is an ontological condition of social life.' In *Time, Narrative and History*, David Carr (1986: 91) suggests that maintaining a narrative is a reaction to impending chaos, thus implying that narratives allow us to distil information into coherent pathways that assist us in relating to, and understanding, the world. Memory then is less a repository of events to be recalled than it is a mechanism that helps make sense of conscious experiences (Murphy 2010: 300). Murphy (2010: 300-301) suggests that remembering is important to narrative coherence, not because it reveals singular truths but because it connects the past with the present in a way that reflects our understanding of time.

Adoption researchers Helen Brookfield, Steven Brown, and Paula Reavey (2008: 475) state that families and significant others play a key role in archiving existence and bridging the gap between past and present. For many care leavers the absence of a structure for remembering via significant others can make it difficult to anchor memories and lineages coherently. In his extensive oral history project with Australian care leavers about the impacts of being disconnected from family heritage, Murphy (2010: 302) found that missing or inconsistent records catalysed many care leavers to become archivists of the self. While most interviewees had some understanding of their origins, many had to recover their heritage to make sense of their early life.

Murphy (2010: 300) states that 'we do not so much "have" memories as "remember" them, actively re-shaping them in ways that make the past continue to be coherent.' Brookfield et al. (2014: 475) state that memory-making is not a solitary activity but a collective act, suggesting that 'the memories we hold of our past are collectively formed out of the storytelling practices which we, and significant others, participate in.' It is through this form of 'joint remembering' that memories become archived into collective banks of stories, affects and narratives (Brookfield et al. 2008: 475). Instead, for many care leavers, the act of memory-making is turned into 'an exercise in merging fiction with bureaucratic fact' (Brookfield et al. 2008: 476). These gaping holes in the archive underscored the absence felt by many care leavers, and consequently, many found the experience of receiving their files to be painful.

Project participant Michelle Rose Turnbull remembers being handed her files in a government office waiting room and being unable to make sense of the bureaucratic memory embedded in the documents. What was presented in the file was a series of forms purporting to represent twenty-one years of life as a ward of the state. Most of the text had been redacted through a whiting out of information, and on many pages her name was the only piece of information visible. The most informative aspect of her file was details regarding her many visits to the Royal Children's Hospital in Brisbane. She was often unwell as a child, and fondly remembers these visits, particularly the kindness of the nursing staff.[8]

On receiving his state files in his early twenties, project participant and care leaver Trevor Laird was shocked to receive a heavily redacted file about his time in out-of-home care. Trevor was never told why he ended up in care, just that his 'mother didn't want him'—a devastating response to the burning question of a child.[9] Such a statement denies the complex social, political and religious attitudes of the time that contributed to many children spending time in care. Other participants recall piecing together an early life story through memory work, reconnection, speculation, and archival and

genealogical research, some suggesting that they have found it easier to locate third and fourth generation relatives and histories than to find out about their mother. Project participant Leonie Sheedy recalled receiving her case files in the mail when she was seven months pregnant, only to find almost no information about her time as a ward of the state with the exception of a series of belittling comments—evidence of the deficit discourses and low expectations that children in care were routinely subject to (Sheedy 2015; Sheedy in Commonwealth of Australia 2001: 458).[10]

Despite these voids in the archive, the lives of care leavers have been anything but a void. Intersecting with significant social and national histories, care leavers have been at the forefront of social justice and advocacy movements, challenging institutional thinking and systemic corruption for well over 40 years. Additionally, care leavers have been generating new archival memories in non-institutional and highly relational ways.

New kinds of archives are particularly important to communities whose public narratives are deficient or absent due to institutional neglect, historical erasure, or discrimination. In *An Archive of Feelings* queer feminist theorist Ann Cvetkovich (2003) suggests communities that have endured historically silenced trauma often struggle to see themselves reflected in archives and, as a result, require new approaches to constructing personal and community archives. Cvetkovich (2003) argues that institutional archives and clinical diagnostics are deficient expressions of trauma cultures, proposing that repositories of feelings and emotions from everyday encounters and expressions of culture can help counter incomplete, bureaucratic and reductive narratives. These expanding repositories of feeling should help to document the conditions that brought these cultures into existence (Cvetkovich 2003: 12). Thus, these new kinds of archives can express the psychic pain and collective trauma knowledge that evolves from everyday encounters with trauma and memory. By deviating from expected trauma tropes and engaging with subtle affects and impacts, these new archives are capable of demonstrating the presence of trauma in everyday life. Trauma archives can include objects, narratives, and affective expressions of living with and beyond trauma. A scream, an absence, a newsletter, a performative action, a friendship, a funeral, or an artwork may contribute to such archives.

If a narrative is a requirement for a coherent ontology and a way of avoiding chaos, then it is not difficult to imagine the confusion and loss that many children who were raised in state, church, or foster care experienced when trying to construct adult narratives of the self. Building on care leaver knowledge of the quotidian aspects of memory and trauma and the ways they each navigate these encounters with their past, our collaborative artwork—*apart & a part*—aimed to archive and bring into public space these often-unremarkable sites of trauma and memory.

***apart & a part*: towards an archive of feelings**

For many care leavers, the trauma of institutional care sits outside the temporality of ‘history’ or the ‘archive’. Rather it is an ongoing continuum of quotidian responses to everyday encounters with the past. As a collaborative artwork and large-scale public exhibition, *apart & a part* sought to extend the care leaver experience through the notion of Cvetkovich’s archive of feelings. As care leavers are experts on the impacts of institutional care, *apart & a part* sought to explore how care leavers express their lives beyond the archival regime, through the various ways they navigate quotidian encounters with their past.

As I came to understand the ongoing impacts of the absence of personal and familial archives, relations and stories in the lives of many care leavers, locating the less tangible but continuing dimensions of each person’s experience became a core collaborative aim. Through dialogue, cups of tea, and long relational exchanges, we

devised ways of performing, recording, and memorialising through the indexical arts (photography and video). The project did not set out to fill the gaps in existing archives or rebuild individual narratives or case files, but to imagine new forms of recording complex lived experiences that embraced relationality, connection and pleasure. We did not seek to remove the pain and loss in individual stories, but to highlight pain and resistance. In this way, we began to think of the project as contributing to 'a new kind of archive'—an archive of memories and feelings that did not consider archival absences to be deficient, or a void that needed to be filled, but as specialist knowledge expressed *on its own terms*.

In one of our early conversations, Trevor mentioned losing a significant amount of his personal archive in a small house fire. When I enquired about his use of the word 'archive' Trevor identified the legacy of the institution on his life as the need to fastidiously archive his achievements in the absence of anyone else to do so.[11] Despite the substantial personal archive Trevor had created—consisting of newspaper clippings, photos, trophies, ribbons and travel mementos—he felt this content was always balanced against the weight of the unobtainable archive; that which was withheld, unreported, or denied. Our conversation led to a decision to 'archive the archive' as a resistance to the threat of its loss. Over several weekends we photographed every remaining object in his archive. Although we did not seek to make his archive public, the process of photographing the archive sparked hours of storytelling. When I presented Trevor with the subsequent printed photographic record of his archive, he commented that while it was great to have photographs of his archive, it was even more important to have remembered and relayed the stories. This underscored the inherently collaborative and relational act of storytelling, and my unexpected invitation into a fragment of Trevor's story. While the circumstances of his institutionalisation remain unknown, the gaps in Trevor's narrative have marked his experience. His archiving practice is a resistance to the cultural silence of his past. It underscores the knowledge that care leavers have about the social and political conditions that have shaped their lived experience, and the new kinds of archives that might be developed for the care leaver archive.

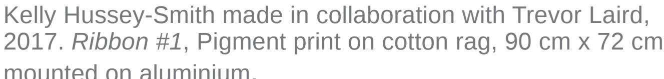
By exploring the affective dimensions of these experiences, we embraced what Susan Best (2016) calls a reparative approach. Best suggests that a reparative approach embraces complexity and prioritises 'pleasure and aesthetic complexity, while also registering the traces of oppression' (Best 2015: 6). Similarly, art theorist Jill Bennett (2005) suggests that the critical insight derived from artwork about trauma is not simply a representation of existing theoretical and philosophical ideas (2005: 152) but potentially new knowledge derived from the visual transformation and expression of these ideas.

By acknowledging the micro traumas (Sheedy 2005) that care leavers experience in day-to-day life, and the creative ways in which they respond to these encounters, our project sought to foreground this specialist knowledge. Cvetkovich (2003: 12) suggests that trauma is an important site of theoretical exploration (beyond clinical diagnosis) because it acts as the 'hinge between systemic structures of exploitation and oppression and the felt experience of them'. Including our affective selves into trauma archives, she suggests, counters 'clichéd narratives' and privileges the knowledge developed by trauma cultures to create more representative social narratives (Cvetkovich 2003: 11-12). By acknowledging the quotidian quality of trauma, the works in *apart & a part* position trauma as a range of experiences and interactions with the everyday—a continuum rather than an event. As narrative researchers Charlene Callahan and Catherine Elliott (1996: 92) suggest, placing value on the 'mundane' aspects of everyday discourse can surface complex narrative understandings in their simplest and most common forms.

Kelly Hussey-Smith made in collaboration with Michelle Rose Turnbull, 2015.' The Sheet #1',
Pigment print on cotton rag, 110 cm x 137 cm, mounted on aluminium.

Affirming the impact of Cvetkovich's everyday traumas, images in this project such as *The Sheet* draw on both the institutional symbols of oppression, dehumanisation, and restraint, and the agency of the individual in locating innovative ways to thrive beyond these encounters. *The Sheet* developed when, after paying several visits to Michelle's home over a number of years, I noticed that she did not own white sheets. Senate inquiries and oral history projects confirm that bedtime was complicated for many children in care: it was both a welcome retreat from the day and an acute reminder of vulnerability and aloneness (Commonwealth of Australia 2004; Penglase 2005). Further, in many Homes and institutions bedwetting was severely punished, leading to shame, fear, and anxiety. Given a sense of animation through flight, the sheet hangs in the frame as both a reminder of the legacy of institutional life, and its diminished power in Michelle's life—a reminder of the unexpected objects that contribute to the care leaver archive.

Cvetkovich (2003: 6) suggests that traumatic histories in archives often take surprising forms that evade existing classifications, stating that 'ephemeral and personal collections of objects stand alongside the documents of the dominant culture in order to offer alternative modes of knowledge'. A series of photographs of Trevor's ribbons celebrate his archival foresight and address the conflict between his personal archive and what remains unobtainable.



Kelly Hussey-Smith made in collaboration with Trevor Laird, 2017. *Ribbon #1*, Pigment print on cotton rag, 90 cm x 72 cm, mounted on aluminium.

Kelly Hussey-Smith made in collaboration with Trevor Laird, 2017. *Ribbon #2*, Pigment print on cotton rag, 90 cm x 72 cm, mounted on aluminium.

Compared with many other children in out-of-home care, Trevor was given tremendous educational and creative opportunities. His adopted mother encouraged him to start ballroom dancing, and he subsequently became a successful competitive dancer. While he enjoyed the physical sensation of dance and the opportunities it afforded him, his mother's involvement in his success was both motivating and overpowering. He travelled the state attending dance meets and performing in theatre productions. However, on gaining independence as a young adult, he eventually moved away to join the army reserve, and without the rituals of family life to maintain communication their relationship changed. Around this time, he also stopped dancing. The six ribbons (selected from hundreds of ribbons) are photographed in flight; in an otherwise empty space. The decontextualisation of the ribbons emphasises the seductive textures, colours, and folds of the fabric that embody something of the feeling of achievement, success and recognition the ribbons commemorate.

The series *The Lost Objects* (from *apart & a part*) is comprised of a selection of over twenty objects from the Australian Orphanage Museum in Geelong. The museum is administered and funded by the Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN) but previously operated out of a small room in their Bankstown office. Having since relocated to Geelong, the museum contains over two thousand objects either recovered from Australian orphanages or donated by Australian care leavers.

The museum was initially conceived to provide evidence of the gross exploitation and neglect of children in care in the face of the erasure and amnesia of these histories. The objects have been lovingly collected by Leonie (participant in *apart & a part* and co-founder of CLAN) from care leavers, orphanages and children's Homes around

Kelly Hussey-Smith made in collaboration with CLAN, 2017. 'Boot', from the series *The Lost Objects*, Pigment print on cotton rag, 35 cm x 35 cm.

Australia, but in many cases, the objects have no known owners. The museum has become an important memory bank for care leavers, and since 2007, these objects have been acknowledged in significant national history projects. Having survived the historical silence surrounding care practices, they have become evidence of absence, rather than the other way around.

Since personal belongings in children's Homes were highly regulated or confiscated, it is likely that each of these objects would have held significance beyond their humble material form. Thus, the objects from the museum included as photographs in *apart & a part* were selected for their likeliness to have been precious. The objects are both an extension of Leonie's story, and a reference to the once known care leavers and their objects that contribute to this care leaver initiated archive.

The decontextualisation of the object from its archival context encourages a reading of the object beyond its function. Implicit in disconnection is knowledge of connection. Therefore, *apart & a part* refers to the liminal sensation of being apart from, a part

Kelly Hussey-Smith made in collaboration with CLAN, 2017. ‘Toys’, from the series *The Lost Objects*, Pigment print on cotton rag, 35 cm x 35 cm.

of, and somewhere in between—thus acknowledging and archiving the specialist knowledge that care leavers have about their past.

Conclusion

Care leaver activism and community building have surfaced the systemic abuse and corruption condoned by state and institutional archives. Yet, until recently, little of this knowledge and resistance had been recorded or archived. By surfacing the logic of state and institutional archives, the works in *apart & a part* have attempted to create a new kind of archive that explores the quotidian and affective dimensions of these experiences.

When your guardian is bureaucratic and administrative, practices such as memory-making, and joint remembering, are more difficult. Many care leavers have found it difficult to construct a narrative of their early life and as a response, have become archivists, activists, and community builders in their adult lives. The aim of *apart & a part* was to produce artworks for a public audience that exposed the conditions of the archive—that is, the authority of the archival regime—and to centre the care leaver knowledges and experiences that developed in response.

Kelly Hussey-Smith made in collaboration with CLAN, 2017. 'Tin', from the series *The Lost Objects*, Pigment print on cotton rag, 35 cm x 35 cm.

Instead of attempting to fill the gaps or recover lost archives, our archival practices attempted to exist outside the logic of a linear and institutional archive. The artworks produced document our collaborations and relationships and extend fragments of the care leaver story to others. Making these stories public (through exhibition practice) has allowed fragments of these stories and experiences to be shared with others. This contributes to the larger project of confronting the cultural silence around institutional care in Australia and the need for care leaver histories to be foregrounded in ways beyond the logic of the archive and on their own terms.

These new kinds of archives were not only designed to challenge state and institutional archives but to expose how state archives remember people. Through both the abstraction and decontextualisation of everyday objects from their contexts, we have created a small 'archive of feelings' that positions care leavers as the experts on living with and through the trauma of dehumanising archival and 'care' practices.

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End Notes

1. Care leaver and researcher Joanna Penglase suggests that a capital H be used to distinguish between a family home and a children's Home as they were distinctly different spaces (Penglase 2005: 5).
2. The term is also used to describe individuals who spent time in detention centres, reformatory schools, and mental health institutions. The term 'Forgotten Australian/s' is also commonly used. In this paper I use the inclusive term 'care leaver' rather than 'Forgotten Australian'.
3. It is important to state that this paper does not focus on the histories and contexts of the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australia—a practice that was racially motivated and endorsed by government policy, and that continues today with more First Nations children being removed from their families than during the Stolen Generation (Thorpe 2021). Limiting this scope did not prevent First Nations care leavers taking part in the project but acknowledged my position as a white-settler artist-researcher and understanding that projects and stories about the Stolen Generations should be led by First Nations people and communities.
4. Participants self-nominated to participate in the research. I met participants through care leaver service providers and advocacy networks in Australia. Although many care leavers contributed to and influenced the project, the six individuals who participated in co-developing artworks were: Michelle Rose, Trevor, Leonie, Bambi, Jessie and Marlene.

5. The project draws on the work of artists such as Rosângela Rennó, Natalie Harkin, Sadie Barnette, Anne Ferran, Ori Gersht, Lynette Wallworth, Fiona Foley, and Sophie Calle.
6. *apart & a part* was first exhibited in September 2017 at POP Gallery in Woolloongabba, Brisbane. The *Lost Objects*, a *subset of apart & a part*, was exhibited at The Art Gallery of Ballarat in 2021 as part of *Out of the Darkness: A Survivors Journey*, an exhibition curated by artist and care leaver Robert House**.**
7. I am referring to official documents produced between 1920 and 1980. Recommendations from advocacy, research, and senate inquiries have identified the need to reform these practices. See also the Records Continuum Model proposed by Frank Upward (1996).
8**.** Personal correspondence with Michelle Rose Turnbull from 2012-15.
9. Personal correspondence with Trevor Laird from 2013-16.
10**.**Personal correspondence with Leonie Sheedy from 2012-16.

Kelly Hussey-Smith made in collaboration with CLAN, 2017. 'Talc' from the series *The Lost Objects*, Pigment print on cotton rag, 35 cm x 35 cm.

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Refereed Article

VISUALISING THE NATURE OF CARE

LIZ HINGLEY

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the physical and psychological pressures critical caregivers face. Clinical settings dominated by machines with limited touch and natural light are far removed from the natural world. In this context, this visual essay reflects on a photographic research project inspired by ecological ideas to consider and express the complex experiences of hospital staff. In 2020 I developed a program of photography walks for National Health Service (NHS) hospital staff, exploring the biodiversity of Hampstead Heath and Waterlow Park in London. Here, I will discuss how this preliminary project illuminates the potential of sensory engagement with nature's cycles of growth, decay and renewal, to shape an expressive channel for critical caregivers, one that is distinct from more traditional models and settings of therapy.

Employing 'visual touch' and emerging therapeutic photography practices informed by ongoing collaboration with hospitals and ecologists, this project seeks to generate new insights and interventions that support the emotional and sensory needs of staff. The project draws on the fields of visual ethnography and medical anthropology with the aim to inform future developments in hospital practice.

keywords: Therapeutic photography, visual research, medical anthropology, healthcare, collaborative research.

Introduction

This visual essay reflects on a program of photography and ecology walks offered to the staff of a central London hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as my continued engagement with the hospital to install staff photographs into the clinical settings in which they work. The text and sequence of photographs in this essay are necessarily complementary to illuminate the nature of this collaborative visual research.

Ambitious scholars and practitioners across both anthropology and photography have asserted that new methodologies, visualisations, and conceptual tools are needed to shed light on the emergent relationships between science, technology, medicine, the body and nature; especially in social reconfigurations post trauma (Fischer 2018; Iversen 2016; Barthes 1980). Recent research by Kings College London and University College London indicates an urgent need to protect mental health and decrease the risk of the functional impairment of critical care staff (Greenberg et al. 2021). Existing mental health support often relies on dialogue through digital devices (for instance, SHAPE recovery at the Department of Experimental Psychology at the University of Oxford and SilverCloud, a digital mental health platform), or within the clinical setting. Anthropologists specialising in psychiatry and medicine have defined the need for a more holistic interdisciplinary approach to gain greater understanding of emerging vulnerability before, during, and after a crisis (Napier 2020; Kleinman 1985). Although the sensory emotions vital to caring are often difficult to communicate and translate into language, most social research still uses questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Here, I will consider how the camera as a tool of research might nurture an insightful dialogue and the practice of 'visual touch' to support the emotional and sensory needs of hospital staff.

Image #1: Photograph by Liz Hingley 2020.

Growing Methodology

During the first COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, Londoners flocked to the city's green spaces. Like many others, I experienced the uplifting effect of daily walks in nearby green spaces on my physical health and wellbeing. As a trained photographer and anthropologist, I was drawn to photograph the upsurge of urbanites communing with Hampstead Heath and Waterlow Park to articulate this new reality. Photographing people dwarfed by trees which have stood through two world wars as well as the growth of urban life around them was therapeutic to me. During the strictest of social distancing measures, my camera became a safe means to communicate with others and my surroundings through the practice of 'visual touch'. The focus required with considered photography provides a sensorial exchange, without the need for physical contact. The pandemic has highlighted the significance of the senses and bodily proximity: touch became a risk; the nose and mouth, sites of sensory exploration for taste, touch and smell became potential vectors of disease and contagion. Open green spaces offered sensory sanctuary. The ponds on Hampstead Heath saw an influx of wild swimmers seeking the embrace of the river water alongside a heron or cormorant. A mass of dens popped up in the woods as parents and children found entertainment and tactile interaction in the construction of a symbolically protective shelter out of gathered branches.

Flooded by stories of the immense pressures of the pandemic on the NHS in the media, I became conscious of the close proximity of the hospital to the Heath and Whittington Park. In an imaginative exercise I walked hundreds of staff dressed in their hospital scrubs and personal protective gear into a wooded area of the Heath and encouraged them all to hug a tree. My visceral imagination was beyond practicality; however, the memory of that poignant image drew me to consider how to better connect the overwhelmed clinical staff with the natural world around them.

The Director of workforce at the hospital responded positively to my email offering free photography workshops, commenting *‘staff very rarely seek help, but they do engage with opportunities to relax and we are always looking for new initiatives. Simple things save lives’* (Anonymous 1 2020).

Ninety-minute photography walks in local green spaces were subsequently advertised on the staff communication bulletins. I sourced high quality digital cameras for participants through Canon, who generously sponsored the workshops with a set of their latest models. The workshop process, as well as production of quality imagery that respects the creative vision of participants, is of equal importance to me.

The mindful walks sought to connect staff with accessible nature and provided the time and space for sensory exploration and self-expression through photography. Freed from their uniforms and codes of clinical conduct, staff working across different departments shaped and shared the experience. I loosely guided groups of between five to eight participants on an investigation of the local biodiversity, the seasonal changes to look

Image #2: Photograph by Liz Hingley 2020

out for, and the different plant and animal species, as well as the history of the Heath and Waterlow Park. It has long been acknowledged that our wellbeing relies on our respect for the body’s manifold connections to the human and non-human cycles of the living world (Berry 2011: 12-53; Bateson 1973). The campaign to save Hampstead Heath from development in the nineteenth century was at the heart of what became the new conservation movement and led to a new understanding of the value of open space in town planning (Lawrence 2019). Commonly termed ‘the lung of London’, the 800 acres of land boasts 25 species of butterfly, 180 species of bird and some of the rarest fungus types in the UK. Waterlow Park has also resisted development and been preserved for the health and wellbeing of the city. In 1889, former Lord Mayor of London Sir Sydney Waterlow gave the deeds of the park to the public as a ‘garden for the gardenless’ (Cooper 2006). The hospital is surrounded by a rare wealth of enchanting green space for an inner-city area, however many of the healthcare staff commented that they rarely have time or seldom think to engage with it.

The participants' vocal and visual responses to the quirky details of fungus, boughs of trees laden with blossom and the maze of aged roots were touching and impressive. Some found a particular focus for their pictures; capturing pathways, light shafts through leaves, the choreography of feathery clouds or the dance of light on water. I encouraged people to embrace their surroundings from new perspectives and heights; raising their eyes and crouching down, as well as to feel the gnarled bark or velvety leaves and smell the sun on wet grass before capture.

After each walk, I arranged one-to-one follow up video calls with the participants, during which we edited their images and discussed the process. This online exchange from home to home proved convenient, intimate and insightful. Staff shared their perspectives and desire to find channels of expression away from the highly charged clinical setting. Both the digital platform and the outdoor photography sessions shaped a neutral space in which both participants and researchers are guests. The minor disruptions due to wi-fi issues and the surprise encounters with a pet parrot, a rainbow and torrential rain on the walks also contributed to collapsing the formalities of traditional structured research interviews.

Most participants expressed surprise at the quality of the images they had created and appreciation for the visual memory of the walk. Each participant selected a photograph to be framed and hung in the area where they work to create windows onto the local natural environs of the hospital. The uptake was overwhelming, and many participants

Image #3: Photograph by Bridget Coleman 2020.

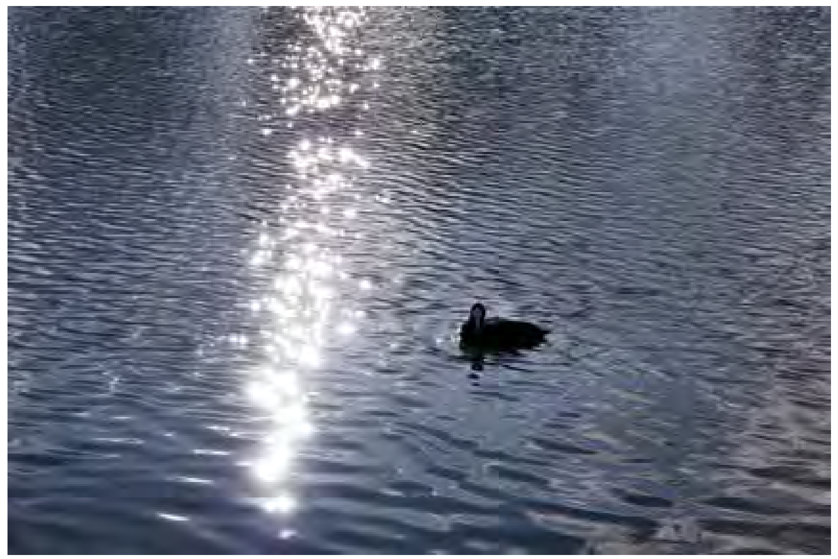

Image #4: Photograph by Lukasz Dziewulski 2020.

informed me that they continue the outdoor photography practice as a creative way to retreat from the rhythm of work and find new meaning. One early career doctor commented: *'Finally I have the chance to breathe. Talking about the history of the place enhances its beauty and my perspective. I saw everything differently through the lens of the camera. I will try to keep up this freeing exercise of deep looking'* (Anonymous 2 2020).

Imagining Windows for Intensive Care

Conscious that frontline clinical staff are often too busy to seek out opportunities via lengthy institutional email bulletins, I pinned vibrant posters advertising the walks in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and made a visit to ICU to meet staff and share the project. The environment of ICU, with little natural light and densely packed high-tech machines, is a disorientating space. I was moved by the smiling photographs of patients given by loved ones, which the nurses fix above beds to enable them to relate to the unconscious person that they are caring for, and with whom they might never be able to speak. Showcasing photography's speculative ability to reveal and probe detailed interconnections between reality, emotions and imagination (Campany 2015), such images create ways of finding new meaning in life and death. During the walks and editing sessions, staff revealed the legacy that the environment had on their own physical and mental health. After one session, an ICU nurse sent the following feedback through email: *'Even though I try to separate work and home life, all the things we have seen and done as well as echoes of the beeping of machines remain in my head. Gaining knowledge of the wildlife out there was wonderful and definitely added to the richness of my appreciation of the heath and health. The experience allowed my mind to truly wander from thoughts about work'* (Anonymous 3 2020).

Towards the end of 2020 I offered one-to-one activities with ICU staff. These became more collaborative and performative. Staff began to share the physical and emotional impact that the death of patients was having on them as we built and photographed protective dens of branches in the woods. A number of nurses felt compelled to note down their surreal and challenging experiences at work but had yet to find the words. I began to view the potential for our collaborative encounters to form a therapeutic research method, which might elaborate on theories of 'collaborative ethnography' (Seligmann and Estes 2020). Informed by my lived experience of grief and various modes of personal therapy that I have undertaken over the last ten years, I valued our exploration of form, shape, touch and visual appearance as an alternative cathartic dialogue. One participant wrote to me after a one-on-one evening photography walk following their twelve-hour shift: *'I don't find it that easy to open up about work. There were few people that really understood the weight and responsibility that comes with overseeing and managing a critical care budget, especially in a health crisis. Seeing and sensing nature with a very good camera and a sensitive guide offered a physical and mental release and perspective'* (Anonymous 4 2020).

Rooting Practice

Anthropologists have called for an awakening of the sensing body in ethnography to respect complexities of taste, structure, and sensation to enrich overall quality of life (Stoller 1997). The maintenance of human health and resilience depends on a relationship to the materiality and vulnerability of our bodies, as well as the ecologies with which we are part (Irving 2017). Predicated on these ideas, the methodological approach taken here brings together those challenged by the constant presence of death with the cycles of non-human ecologies through the expressive medium of photography. The sensory focus required helps people embrace their surroundings, heighten their perceptions and self-awareness. The familiar nature of the visual medium and the simple act of walking offers a generative creative activity when words are

inappropriate or inadequate. Such 'visual touch' takes on a new modality, fundamental for wellbeing in the context of prohibitive haptic experience due to the constraints of social distancing.

Practitioners and scholars in photography have addressed the dynamics between carers, those they care for, and the space for self-care through performative and collaborative camera-centred therapeutic practices (Arnolfini 2020). There is growing acknowledgement that photography can have a valuable therapeutic role, that such experimental processes where principles can emerge from practice represents a parallel ethnography through the lens (Fischer 2018; MacDougall 1997). In *The Sage Handbook of Visual Research Methods*, Loewenthal calls for urgent research to be carried out on therapeutic photography (2020: 26). Anthropologists such as Edwards (2012), Gell (1998), and Pinney and Thomas (2001) have also acknowledged the power and agency of the visual in the interpretation and shaping of shifting cultures both in theory and practice. In my project, a third element is sown, that not only can therapeutic photography be seen as combining visual ethnography with the clinical

Image #5: Photograph by Liz Hingley and Froso Kyriakidoui 2020.

practice of care, but that relationship may also be rooted in an understanding of the importance of our relationship to the natural world.

The responses from participants illuminate the potential of photography in nature to shape a flexible and unfolding creative space, of active conscious and unconscious 'dialoguing' with the world and ourselves (Kopytin 2008; Barthes 1980; Fischer 2018). The experience appeared to inform how they move through and interact with the workplace, colleagues and patients. A number of staff expressed a deeper awareness of their detachment from the outside world in the enclosed space of the hospital, and

that they would seek to take future breaks outside to feel the weather and the natural light. Many commented on how refreshing it was to exchange with each other without the codified clinical uniforms, and how it provided perspective on lives and families beyond the workspace. The process sprung new forms of knowledge for myself as researcher and new ways of doing and being within the medical environment for staff.

For artists who interact with the natural landscape, the physical and emotional process of both the sculptural and photographic practice is often transformative (Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017; Pinney and Thomas 2001). Such artists see their work speaking to the continuity of life on earth (Long 1994; Goldsworthy 1998; Fulton 2015) and the ritual performance of identity (Mendieta 1980; Wells 2011). Playing with photography's specific grounding qualities, such as its basis in reality, pioneers of phototherapy Spence and Martin embraced collaborative methods based on experimentation and re-enactment for self-exploration and personal growth (Martin and Spence 1988).

The methodology developed here expands on recent work within the field of therapeutic photography that responds to personal and social issues using imagination and performance to look at past, present, and future. Exhibitions, including *A Picture of Health* (2020) and *Jo Spence: Phototherapy* (2020) showcase an appreciative desire for innovations in therapeutic photography, and the medium's capacity to critically question painful contemporary experiences which are often difficult to articulate verbally (Weiser 2004), with particular attention to photography's ability to observe and convey loss and grief (Barthes 1980; Sontag 1977).

The power of nature images in hospitals and the valuable role of art therapy in the recuperation of patients is well researched and applied. Across cultures and socio-economic groups there is striking agreement that viewing nature can have a restorative and calming effect (Ulrich 2000; ACE 2010). Projects such as *Bringing the Outside In*, initiated in the 1990s at Dorchester County Hospital, and subsequent research, laid the foundations for a strategy to promote the arts across healthcare settings in the UK.

Image #6: Photograph by Liz Hingley 2020.

The creative activities I nurtured in 2020 and 2021 fostered trusting relationships with highly creative hospital staff and the enthusiastic new hospital art group, with whom I am currently working to install the staff photographs into the hospital infrastructure. The installation design has been shaped in consultation with staff and the understandably cautious hospital estates team. One nurse emphasised that *'hospitals are brutal and ugly places, and anything we can do to make them more comfortable and comforting has to be a good thing'* (Anonymous 5 2020). However, many of the staff I questioned felt that art in hospitals is often incongruous and unrelatable. With sensitivity to the complex requirements of a clinical setting, staff's photographs will be printed on recycled vinyl and installed on the ceilings of lifts, above beds and on windows to weave local nature into a visual poetics of space that challenges the traditional placement of hospital paintings and photographs (Bachelard 1969).

Concluding Reflections

This project initiated an ongoing investigation into the potential for combining the sensory methods of anthropology with the practices of therapeutic photography to shape a space of expression, reflection and dialogue. In forming this new space for interpretation and mediation, the research expands on the growing fields of visual and collaborative research, with a view to going beyond the traditional therapeutic settings that risk problematising psychological stress, requiring people to confront painful events too directly and creating additional psychological stigma around mental illness.

Robust evidence is important, both to inform effective policy making, to demonstrate the impact and value of the arts, and to improve practice. The fertile ground uncovered here highlights the need for more extensive research into ways that artistic discourse and communication with the natural world might contribute to improving healthcare relationships, attitudes, settings and practices. There is much to gain from the restorative power of the natural world and a greater understanding that our physical and mental health, sense of place and belonging is interwoven with the health of the ecologies of which we are part.

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Image #7: Photograph by Liz Hingley and Shaparak Rahmi 2020.

Image #8: Photograph by Liz Hingley and Lindsay Taylor 2020.

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Liz Hingley is a photographer, curator and anthropologist. She is currently Artist in Residence at Kings College London (Digital Humanities) and an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham. Liz's work explores the systems of belonging and belief that shape places around the world, which have been particularly enriched by migration. Her practice is inherently collaborative and seeks to create connections between disciplines, geographies and generations. Liz's projects have received numerous awards, including the Lens Culture portrait prize, PhotoPhilanthropy Award, Prix Virginia and Getty Editorial Grant. Her work reaches international audiences through publications, workshops and exhibitions, from galleries to gardens, from hospitals to streets. The book, *Under Gods* (Dewi Lewis publishing, 2010), supported by a scholarship from Italian research and communication institute FABRICA, became an international touring exhibition. As a Visiting Scholar at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, Liz published *End Of Lines* (2013), *Sacred Shanghai* (Washington University Press 2019) and *Shanghai Sacred* (GOST books 2020). She has previously held positions within SOAS University, The Migration Research Centre, University College London, and the University of Austin, Texas (Art History). As curatorial advisor to Side Gallery, UK, Liz recently curated exhibitions with a focus on eco feminism and environmental justice. She is a trustee of the AmberSide UNESCO world heritage collection of photography and film.

A CUPPA AND A YARN: EXPLORING METHODOLOGY

JODY HAINES

A Cuppa and a Yarn is an introduction to a methodology I have coined as an Indigenous feminist (new) materialism, which I have developed across the course of my practice-led PhD research (in progress). The article covers Indigenous methods of yarning and relationality, along with standpoint as situated knowledge, and how these methods are applied within my lens-based social practice to create collaborative photographic portraits. Applying a fictocritical approach to writing, the methodology is conveyed through a cuppa and a yarn, combining theory, poetics, and memories of my nanna to unpack the core components of my practice-led research.

keywords: Relationality, yarning, situated knowledge, care, nurture, listening, photography and portraiture.

In the following article I will discuss my research methodology and how it has emerged. My practice-led research focuses on creating portraiture through a lens-based socially engaged method. It is a method that privileges the engagement and relationships that occur through creating portraits, rather than primarily focusing on the photographic image outcomes. These portraits are created with both still photography and moving image, and presented primarily outdoors across public spaces as either large static images or as projections. The work is often a collection of big faces in public spaces – that apply a returned gaze and occupy space. Drawing on my own cultural background and standpoint – being a proud descendent of the tommeginne people of north-west lutruwita[1] – the portraits have been made through both yarning and relational practices, forming what I describe as an Indigenous feminist (new) materialism. The methodology flows from the principles of respect, care, listening, reciprocity, and relationality. As such this respect and care flows through to the collaborative portrait-making, which drifts and floats directly out of the yarning sessions, endeavouring to create a personal intimate experience in the making of the portrait.

The questions I am researching in my PhD pertain to creating sites of connection and sites of resistance within a seemingly[2] disconnected world. These concepts of resistance and connection will be discussed in my future exegesis, but here I will focus on the methodology and how I am applying this to image making. Drawing on memories, theory, and recent projects, I'll relay this methodology via a fictocritical and poetics approach[3], exploring my practice-led research through a cup of tea and the relationships and connection that can occur while making images. I invite you to grab a cuppa[4] and join me on the journey.

I am a coffee drinker. I consume multiple cups, every day. Double shots, black, strong, and sugarless. But whenever I am working on a project or trying to write I make a cuppa tea. It wasn't until recently that I asked myself why. It never seemed important until now.

As a kid, I watched, listened, and learnt. As all kids do, we replicate and mimic the adults and older kids around us, to learn, to grow. I used to watch my nan and the way she made tea. The care and exactness that went into her making. The expression on her face when she held the cup in both hands and didn't realise anyone was watching.

Moments of joy. Pain. Relief. Fear. Moments of planning and reflecting. A moment of centring, readying herself for the next move, the next moment.

Tea played out when conversations were to be had. When aunts, daughters, sisters and friends came into her kitchen. The ritual of making, poured into cups, creating a bubble of intimacy and care that the outside world could not touch. Tea was laughed over. Cried over. Connected over. Gossiped over and shared. To me, tea seemed to have magical powers that helped people bond and talk.

Nan was not unique in her tea making and sharing. Tea has been the starting point for a yarn with every Elder I've known and learnt from – all the big and small conversations. Making and sharing a cup of tea has imbedded itself into my practice and has now become the starting point for every image I have made and every conversation I have enjoyed. Tea has become part of the process of relationship building, creating a location of care, a connector of time and place, with what seems like elastic spatial relationality that has the power to transport my imagination.

My research methodology for creating collaborative portraits is something I am calling an Indigenous feminist (new) materialism. As a methodology that firstly privileges Indigenous world views and Indigenous research methods (Atkinson 2002: 5-22; Bessarab and Ng'Andu 2010: 37-50; Martin and Mirraboopa 2003; Nakata 2007; Tuhiwai Smith 1999), it incorporates an Indigenous feminist standpoint (Anderson 2020: 37-51; Foley 2003: 44-52; Moreton-Robinson 2000, 2013: 331-347) and hinges on the interconnectivity of all matter – Country, people, animal, time, space, breathe, memory, future, the list is ongoing – it is the relationship that lives in and through time, space and being, the interactions of material forms (Hokowhitu 2020: 131-136; Ravenscroft 2018: 353-370; Todd 2016: 4-22). The methodology places my body at the centre of my epistemology and draws on and pays respect to the Indigenous academics, including those cited above, who have fought to legitimise Indigenous ways of knowing and being as research methods in Western academia.

I began this article talking about tea as a location to begin a conversation, I am sipping tea now as I write, as I begin to build a relationship with you, the reader. What I have learnt through my Elders is that tea can be a site of caregiving and caretaking, it is a site of conversation and history making. Tea is also a commodity with a colonial past, I have a shared history with this tea, it is another reminder of the ongoing imperial and colonial project First Nation peoples across the world face. Writer, educator and Professor of Indigenous education at the University of Waikato, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou, Tuhourangi)[5], in her ground-breaking analysis of Western research methodologies, *Decolonizing Methodologies, Research and Indigenous Peoples* says, 'imperialism frames the indigenous experience. It is part of our story, our version of modernity' (1999: 20). Tea reminds me of my own duality, of being both colonised and a coloniser, never fully formed from one or the other perspective. Tea has become a part of my story, its material matter connecting to my history, my memories, my research journey.

The materiality of tea

from the sun, the earth,

life and shimmer[6]*.*

A commodity. India. England.

Colonisation.

Claimed by the coloniser

and introduced it to our colonised land.

Billy's. Riverside fires. Thermos.

Proppa good.

Bushels.

Buys art.

Buys Aboriginal art.

a site of resistance?

The first time I remember drinking tea, I was sitting at my grandmother's kitchen table, tears streaming down my face, blowing bubbles of snot from my nose, and physically shaking.

Tea

table

care

I had been in a fight at school, with two boys from my kindergarten class. The boys had been taunting me, calling me an 'abo'. I didn't know what an 'abo' was, but the way the word was being yelled – the tone and the venom that carried from the boys' tongues to strike at my ears – felt wrong and burned deep. I hit back physically, and they returned my force. Through tears, I asked my grandmother why they'd called me an abo?

conversation

big and small

hard and thick

She poured me a cup of sweet tea and told me it was because we are Aboriginal. It was the first time I realised there was a term for our difference – and that my body sat at the core. Together we sat, Nan held my hand and continued to talk. I listened and drank the sweet tea.

listening.

My self-discovery

through personal

hide and seek

This is where I first began to learn to listen.

Tea

a moment of truth?

A site of connection?

Yarning and relationality

Learning to listen has imbedded itself into my practice. Being a lens-based socially engaged artist who creates portraiture with humans who identify as women[7], listening and relationship building is central to my practice. Each portrait is a collaboration, made over multiple sessions – two conversational and one photographic. These exchanges occur over a cuppa tea, where we explore our differences and our standpoints, the conversation is drawn from my personal understanding and experience of yarning. To yarn, or yarning, is a term used by Aboriginal people in everyday language (Fredericks

et al. 2011: 1). To have a yarn is to have a talk. It's not only a casual conversation, but a multifaceted approach to interactions. A yarn can be a moment of knowledge exchange, a moment to be educated, or disciplined, a time to learn and listen, time to tell stories, enquire about family, connect to history. A time for problem solving, and a time to console.

Researchers Lynore Geia (Bwgcolman), Barbara Hayes and Kim Usher in their paper *Yarning/Aboriginal storytelling: Towards an understanding of an Indigenous perspective and its implications for research practice* provide one of the most beautifully poetic descriptions of yarning that I have read. They say it:

> is not a static process; it begins and it progresses, through loud and raucous engagement, to a sudden move into contemplation and silence. Aboriginal yarning is a fluid ongoing process, a moving dialogue interspersed with interjections, interpretations, and additions. The stories remain in our conscious state like a thread hanging, waiting to be picked up again, to be continued, reconstructed, reinforced and once again embedded in our ontology. Yarning almost always contains the threads of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island history as it moves into the present tense, its parameters within present time is filtered through the memories of the past as the two move simultaneously and at points collide and reveals fragments of the future (2013: 15).

This description resonates with what I understand yarning to be, the loudness, the quietness, the strings and threads of connection, the clashing of time that elastically moves with, through and around you. Connected and embedded in our ontology. Karen Martin (Noonuccal and Bidjara) calls this our Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing:

> Ways of Knowing are specific to ontology and Entities of Land, Animals, Plants, Waterways, Skies, Climate and the Spiritual systems of Aboriginal groups. Knowledge about ontology and Entities is learned and reproduced through processes of: listening, sensing, viewing, reviewing, reading, watching, waiting, observing, exchanging, sharing, conceptualising, assessing, modelling, engaging and applying (2018: 209).

The process of yarning and its research validity is outlined in an article, *Yarning About Yarning as a Legitimate Method in Indigenous Research*, by Dawn Bessarab (Bardi and Indjabandi) and Bridget Ng'andu. Here they describe yarning as 'an Indigenous cultural form of conversation' (2010: 37). In the article, Bessarab and Ng'andu outline that there are four different types of yarning – social, research, collaborative and therapeutic – and each has its own set of behaviours and protocols (2010: 40-41). Social yarning takes place before the research begins, research yarning is a semi-structured interview that is relaxed but focussed on the research, collaborative yarning happens when sharing and discussing knowledge that can lead to new discoveries, and lastly therapeutic yarning occurs when a 'participant in telling their story discloses information that is traumatic or intensely personal and emotional. The researcher switches from the research topic to the role of a listener' (Bessarab and Ng'andu 2010: 40-41).

My personal approach to yarning in research includes the four different types Bessarab and Ng'andu have laid out. Although it is often more circular and interwoven, blending the elements, it can jump backwards and forwards, it is a dance that requires mobility, adaptability, deep listening, and respect. The sessions are never recorded, they often begin with a social yarn, and move into the next phase, which for my research is often a mash up of the research yarn and the collaborative yarn. I have a set of semi-structured

open-ended questions that I weave into and through the yarn, but as the people in the research projects are also often my collaborators, we are together unpacking and learning, looking for new discoveries as we talk. On occasion, intensely personal and emotional conversations have emerged, and I become a listener, providing care through listening. As Bessarab and Ng'andu highlight, therapeutic yarning is 'not a counselling yarn' (2010: 41).

Through yarning, we are coming together and sharing knowledge (personal, cultural and tacit knowledge), aiming for an equal and shared space from which to create and learn (Fredericks et al. 2011: 13-15; Martin 2018: 92-93). We explore and connect. Design and debate. I will note that yarning itself does not mean a relationship is developed, but rather it is a relational practice. When yarning hasn't worked in my practice it has been because I have fallen into thinking about it as research, which then falls into an extractive process and not a relational process. Like the tea that begins our sessions, research too is an imperial process and at the heart of imperialism is extraction – extracting knowledge, specimens, resources (Tuhiwai Smith 1999: 1-44).

We make this together; we hold and make space for something else

to come through the threads.

My understanding of relationality grew from sitting on and with Country, drinking tea and listening to my grandmothers' stories. From breathing in the smoke of the fire and watching how the light danced, making films in my mind from the flickering embers and flames, while I sat, feeling the wind carrying the million-year-old rock that now clings to my legs as sand. It was learnt through the stars, the call of the raven and the yellow crested cockatoo, and from the piss ants that lived in my dictionary. It relates back to Karen Martin's quote from earlier, it is 'specific to ontology and entities of Land, Animals, Plants, Waterways, Skies, Climate and the Spiritual systems of Aboriginal groups' (2003: 209). It is our relationships with each other and all matter of existence.

When talking about relationality or a relational approach I am not referring to relational aesthetics as coined by Nicolas Bourriaud (2009), but rather to an interconnected embedded and embodied understanding of matter and time, which aligns more with new materialism (Alaimo and Hekman 2008; Barad 2007) and to Stacy Alaimo's Trans-corporeality, meaning 'that all creatures, as embodied beings, are intermeshed with the dynamic, material world, which crosses through them, transforms them, and is transformed by them' (Alaimo 2018: 435). While saying it aligns with new materialism, what I mean is new materialism aligns with Indigenous relationality.

New Materialism is not new to Indigenous scholars and Indigenous people. This new knowledge is based on Indigenous ontology, ways of knowing and being – knowledge that has been practised for millennia, holding a deep time understanding of the enmeshed and embodied existence of all matter (Hokowhitu 2020; Ravenscroft 2018; Todd 2015, 2016). While new materialism works to decentre the human and remove the nature/culture human/non-human divide it does so from a Western centric position, one that does not, or rarely, acknowledges Indigenous thought. Canadian Indigenous feminist, Zoe Todd (Red River Métis and Otipemisiwak), in a recent article points out that new materialism and post humanism 'is spinning itself on the backs of non-European thinkers. It is not Indigenous peoples who are credited for these incredible insights into the "more-than-human", sentience and agency' (Ravenscroft 2018: 358 quoting Todd (2016)).

Times fluidity awash,

past and future crashing together,

a seafoam of presence lingers and dries on the shore.

Today I was gifted a sea snail shell. Smooth. Pearl-like to touch. A helix in the centre, the snail's gateway to the world. An entry that expands and grows to accommodate the developing organism within.

Helix of change.

I catch myself staring at fallen leaves spiralling in the wind. Slowing rising and falling, spinning, and hanging. Creating the same path as the snail's helix that I slowly rub under my thumb. I forget what has

just been said to me.

Helix of change?

I remember my nanna taking me to rock pools and finding these snails. Wading through waters. Sun

darkening our skin. Sea salt catching on our lashes. Sand stinging my thighs.

Time contracting and expanding all at once.

Invisible Threads of consciousness connecting us all.

Collaborations: Applying yarning, relationality and standpoint

Beginning my research from understanding that 'interconnectedness…between and among all living things and the earth, which is inhabited by a world of ancestors and creator beings' (Moreton-Robinson 2017: 71) has helped me to create a methodology that flows from the principles of respect, care, listening, reciprocity, and relationality. As such this respect and care flows through to the collaborations in the research for my lens-based images. The collaborative portrait-making drifts and floats directly out of the yarning sessions. A personal intimate experience is had in the creation of the portrait, creating a site of connection that flows into the image. For example, *Lorna, in-between* (Haines 2020), from the series *Eye to Eye*: this work grew from three sessions of sharing, drinking tea, and connecting – not only to each other but to the moment we shared. These sessions occurred during the 2019-2020 East coast bushfires (Cook et al. 2021). While the fire itself was hundreds of kilometres away from where we met, the smoke of a million spirits reached into our lungs and clung to our hair. Death, life, and renewal were woven into and out of our yarns. History, hope and despair all clung to the moments. We sat in-between them all. Between then and now and where to next? While exploring our own mortality.

In these collaborations, we – my co-collaborator and I – are focusing on the act of making, and the act of making together.

the flow

of movement,

sharing,

yarning,

listening

It's a focus on the collaborative act of making rather than what is produced. We yarn, we discover, we laugh, we cry, we drink tea. We explore the threads that link us through time, and matter. For me, we blur the boundaries of artist, researcher, participant, to land as co-collaborators/creators.

In parallel to yarning and relationality sits the use of feminist standpoint as a situated knowledge; a knowledge that comes from many viewpoints (Haraway 1988: 575-596).

I am applying the use of standpoint from my own ontological positioning. In doing so, I recognise that the women I am creating portraits with, sharing the same air and moment as me, will also have their own unique ontological location (Indigenous or non-Indigenous). These two unique positions contribute to a very different understanding of the moment we share – due to our social, political, historical, and cultural conditioning – but through the entanglement of time it is a position that we share either consciously or unconsciously. Our yarns focus on personal experiences from diverse female perspectives, through what Sandra Harding, American philosopher of feminist and postcolonial theory, describes as 'an organic logic of research' (2016: 9min). This approach is not to create ethnographies of women's worlds but to look at the multiple versions of feminist views from individual perspectives, and how these perspectives combine into a group consciousness for the production of knowledge (Harding 2004: 35). Knowledge, once again, refers to our personal, cultural, and tacit knowledge. It's the combination of yarning, relationality and feminist standpoint that drives the image and the experience.

Their story connects to my gut.

I too know this story, deeply.

The words sharply pulse through my cells followed by a thousand women's voices whispering

"I too know this story"; they too felt this story.

Organic remembering.

Collective connecting.

Organic research through relationship building,

through friendship.

Through time

From within the intersections of our opinions and location, we are searching for what it is 'to be'[8] and how this knowledge lands within the seafoam of our entangled existence. Moving across the stages of yarning for the image *#HOPE, Natasha* (Haines 2019) from the ongoing series *#IAMWOMAN* was an occasion where we arrived at therapeutic yarning. After placing the camera aside and listening while Natasha spoke, we then sat together in a long comfortable silence, letting the thick air we breathed contract and expand, continuing our connection. After the silence disseminated, my collaborator wished to continue, and together we made an image, a representation of the moment. Sara Ahmed writes in *Living a Feminist Life* that 'moments, can become movements' (2017: 436). Moments – moments of change, resistance, growth and disruption, moments of listening, sharing and acknowledging, moments of action, stillness and laughter. A moment of connection, a moment of nurture. What radical possibilities could emerge if we all took up the mantel of the moment? If the 'moment' generated creates a movement that decentres possessive individualism and instead focused on care and nurturing. In The *Master's Tools*, Audre Lorde talks about the power of nurturing, saying:

> for women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power is discovered. It is this real connection which is so feared by a patriarchal world (2017: 90).

Through my projects, the collaboratively made portrait becomes a document of our nurture through organic remembering/collective connecting; a reminder of the redemptive power held in a 'moment' of connection. These moments always bring

me back to my nanna making and sharing tea. Nurturing those she loved and knew, along with those she was yet to love and know, moments full of redemptive power, impenetrable by the oppressions of the world. My nan, it turns out, was my first true site of resistance and connection.

Conclusion

As I close out this writing, my cup lays empty. Tea leaves cling to their porcelain walls, forming shapes and stories I am yet to know. Together, we've made a material journey through time, tea, yarning, and relationships as a way of introducing my methodology of Indigenous feminist (new) materialism and how I apply this methodology to creating collaborative photographic portraiture. Our journey began by applying and privileging Indigenous knowledges and methods as the core of the work, primarily the application of yarning and Indigenous relationality, then extending the methodology into standpoint, discussing how each is applied to the creation of a photographic portrait (both still and moving portraits). This research methodology, like the helix shell of the sea snail I was gifted earlier, is continuing to grow and expand across my PhD journey, a journey where no doubt many more cups of tea will be consumed over long and elastic yarns.

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End Notes

1. lutruwita is the palawa/Indigenous place name for Tasmania. tommeginne people are the Indigenous people/first people of Northwest Tasmania. Both tommeginne and lutruwita are reflected in lowercase as palawa/Indigenous languages do not apply capitalisation to names and places.
2. I use 'seemingly' here, as the world, if viewed through the lens of Western neo-liberal society, is socially disconnected and isolated, as premised by possessive individualism (Macpherson 1962) but if you view that same world through Indigenous relationality, we find space for a very different possibility.
3. I have chosen to blend theory, fiction/story and reflection to create the narrative of my research as a creative measure to attain voice, especially within academia, where language is often inaccessible, colonial, and patriarchal to my ears. The fictocritical method emerged on the Canadian art scene and fringes of Australian academia in the 1990s as a speaking position for 'contemporary feminist, post/colonial, queer, and other marginal/ised discourses' (Haas 2017: 8).
4. A 'cuppa' is a colloquial term used for a cup of tea.
5. Throughout this article First Nations authors will be introduced by their mob (clan/tribe) or Country. This information will appear in brackets after their name. Acknowledging Country and mob is a respect protocol for Indigenous peoples. It acknowledges history, knowledge, connection and the ontological position of the person speaking.
6. Deborah Bird Rose in her essay, Shimmer: When all you love is being trashed says Shimmer is an Aboriginal aesthetic, 'Yolngu term bir'yun, which translates as "brilliant" or "shimmering"'(2017: 53).
7. The use of the word 'women' does not privilege cis gendered women, it is inclusive of transwomen, non-binary and non-gender conforming persons who wish to take part in the projects. On various occasions I do and have made work that includes men or these humans who identify as men.
8. 'to be' – human, woman, marginalised, privileged, young, old, black, brown, white, etc. we are searching for a sense of self, a starting location of our life's cartography.

Image #1: '#Hope, Natasha', Jody Haines 2019.

AUTHOR/PHOTOGRAPHER

Jody Haines is an artist based in Naarm/Melbourne, whose art practice – a combination of social practice and photo media – is most recognisable for her large-scale public activations, or what she fondly calls her 'big face in public space' work.

Jody's relational practice is built on Indigenous feminist new materialism – a combination of yarning, relationality and standpoint. Her work explores themes of identity, representation, and the female gaze, looking for what radical possibilities can emerge when we centre care, respect, listening, and reciprocity at the heart of our work and relationships.

Using site-specific and relational methods, Jody has collaborated with local communities across Australia, developing projections, paste-ups, and street-wide photographic activations. Including the projects Women Dreaming for Women of the World & Festival 2018, Our People Our Place for Horizon Festival 2019, and multiple iterations of #IAMWOMAN an ongoing relational portrait series, including Arts House 2019, Immerse Public Art Festival 2018, and One Night in Footscray 2018 and more.

Jody is a PhD candidate at RMIT School of Art, a committee member of Arts West Alliance, and a board member for Composite: Moving Image Agency & Media Bank. Jody is a proud descendant of the tommeginne peoples of northwest lutruwita (Tasmania).

Image #2: 'Gen, connection', 2020, Genevieve Grieves and Jody Haines.

Image #3: 'Iggy and Paul', 2020 Iggy Mabor and Jody Haines.

Image #4: 'Self-portrait (F**K Covid)', 2020, Jody Haines.

Image #5: 'Tania, Pensar es altamente feminino', 2020, Tania Canas and Jody Haines.

Image #6: 'Lorna, in-between', 2020, Lorna Hannan and Jody Haines.

Image #7: 'Pauline, Don't tell me to smile', 2020, Pauline Bell and Jody Haines.

NOT WITH A BANG BUT A WHIMPER

RAY COOK

Not With a Bang But a Whimper is the first of three photographic series made between 2004 and 2009 that interpret the post-AIDS, millennial rise of legitimacy for gay men. The phenomenon is commonly seen as evidence of Western societies becoming ever more enlightened, but I propose it simply reflects the usefulness of gays to neoliberal capitalism. Legitimacy is wielded as a reward for gay docility, and to position gay men as tutors and guides for heterosexual men through the complex terrain of consumption. Not With a Bang But a Whimper uses the archetype of a clown to invert representations of gay men used in the lifestyle television show, Queer Eye for the Straight Guy. *The images in this series emerge from an allegorical theatre, produced in the spirit of the vaudeville skit or satirical drag show, which draws from a critically reinvigorated repertoire of the gay male cultural idiom of Camp. The series begins with a strident critique of neoliberal capitalism but develops into a more subjective, multi-dimensional appraisal of shifting gay male consciousness.*

keywords: Gay legitamacy, queer photography, queer activism, queer eye, queer.

Not With a Bang But a Whimper

Since the late 1980s when HIV began to impact on my circle of friends and me, I have used photographs to think. In the spirit of the vaudeville skit or drag show, I would freeze an allegorical, theatrical fiction at the appropriate moment with my camera. Gay male photography has a long tradition of employing an alibi of fiction to deflect the consequences of incriminating disclosures. Often these fictions comprised affirmative representations that countered mainstream social disapproval. The propositions I had made were laid out on a table, immobilised for contemplation or dissection. Like generations of gay image makers before me, I used theatrical, tableaux photography as a way to communicate more selectively to the community with whom I identified.

Not With a Bang But a Whimper is a series of ten selectively toned, silver gelatin photographs made in 2004. They were a response to realities of gay life that were peculiar to that time—specifically, a new visibility of gay men in the popular media especially in the lifestyle genre. The subsidence of AIDS as an urgent threat in the public consciousness combined with a burgeoning gay presence in sitcoms, reality shows and the lifestyle genre provided conditions for a seemingly greater social legitimacy for gay men, eventually culminating in the legalisation of same sex marriage two decades later.[1] While this visibility and legitimacy was welcomed by many, particularly younger gay men, I was distrustful. I maintain that this body of work is significant because it chronicles an important juncture in queer history from a perspective that is often overwritten by dominant mainstreams. After providing a description of the context that the series engages with, I will outline a methodology derived from the subcultural idiom of Camp in which I develop a clown character to act in a satirical theatre. I conclude by reflecting upon insights gained by reflecting upon experience within a propositional space.

Context: The Personal and the Political

Throughout the 1990s, I had been immersed in a subcultural world dictated by HIV. Living with HIV had extracted me from the mainstream world and suspended me in

a closed place where I was largely oblivious to what lay outside. The necessary preoccupation with complicated treatment regimes and a focus on my own mortality obscured from me the changes occurring in the broader culture. With the new effective therapies introduced in 1996, I slowly re-engaged with the world around me. These drugs were difficult to take and managing them consumed much time and energy. Side-effects made me feel like I was getting worse, not better. It was some years before it became apparent that my prognosis had dramatically improved. HIV was becoming manageable. By the early 2000s, the drugs had become easier to endure and I began reconciling myself to a new future. I started looking more attentively at the world I had neglected and was surprised to notice so many seemingly favourable representations of gays in popular culture; however, I sensed something undisclosed and under-discussed underpinned this new legitimacy. American queer theorist Suzanna Danuta Walters claims that market mediated legitimacy divides gay communities along moral as well as economic grounds – sanctioned, clean, monogamous conformist, assimilationist gays and contaminated, disease carrying, non-conforming liberationist gays. She argues that the current gay visibility does not equate to full citizenship or universal legitimacy. 'Rather, it redistributes new forms of homophobia anchored in class—legitimacy allocated on market viability merely passes the inequality down the ladder' (2001: 19). While market-negotiated, mediated legitimacy may dissolve moral stigma associated with homosexuality, it institutes new inequalities based on class and conformity.

These feelings of uneasiness triggered Not With a Bang But a Whimper, leading me to the proposition that rather than reflecting society's progress to an ever-more enlightened state of civilisation, gay legitimacy was the result of capitalism's imperatives to exploit and expand. I declared a critical vantage for myself in opposition to the values of neoliberalism. Since the 1970s, neoliberalism has been the dominant economic paradigm, and it has incrementally naturalised its values through the social and cultural as well as economic worlds. Neoliberalism prioritises the market over democracy, privileges elites, suppresses community and equity; dismantles the welfare state; operates without transparency; prioritises vapid, commercial culture and constitutes the subjects who live under it to welcome their subordination.

Neoliberal values seep into cultural and social areas of experience, reshaping our ideals of citizenship to align with its imperatives. British anthropologist David Harvey writes, 'neoliberalism holds that social good lies in maximising the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market' (2005: 3). Cultural critic Lisa Duggan argues that neoliberalism is a complex project conducted through diverse institutions with 'an agenda for reshaping the everyday life of contemporary global capitalism' (2003: 70). American sociologist John O'Connor also points to the cultural, social, and ultimately personal dimensions of neoliberalism, saying that while many studies have been concerned with the history and economic consequences of neoliberalism, 'few studies interrogate its conceptual standing, its institutional breadth, or its inherent logic' (2010: 691). I sought to use this project to go some small distance towards redressing this oversight by drawing connections between the cultural logic of neoliberalism and the social phenomena of rising gay legitimacy. I reasoned that market-mediated legitimacy must then be conditional on the advancement of these imperatives and was therefore disciplinary, that is, conformity was rewarded while deviation from this imperative was not. Seductive as legitimacy might seem, its underlying purpose was to control gays and to use them to reproduce exemplary neoliberal citizen/consumers. These suspicions compelled me to test these ideas for myself with the process of making images in the studio.

A Note on Written Expression

This work aimed to use the 'felt' dimensions of the problem as a resource to reveal new meanings, perspectives, and understandings. Throughout this document I have consciously used expressive language to convey a sense of subjective autobiographical engagement with a cultural phenomenon. American methodologist Patricia Leavy writes: 'Artists are present in their renderings. Artists cannot disavow their role in the creation of their work. By imprinting the rendering with one's personal signature, the artist–researcher is accounting for his or her active presence in the resulting representation' (2015: 280). While being mindful of the historical and theoretical data, the written expression must effectively convey something of lived experience. According to phenomenological methodologist Clark Moustakas, when explicating a research project using creative practice to address the lived 'sensation', language should form 'a comprehensive story that is portrayed in vivid, alive, accurate, and meaningful language' (1994: 19). To acknowledge the value of the 'subjective' data the project has drawn from, I have sought to blend two voices, one the subjective tone of personal experience and one that evokes critical detachment with the intended effect of bringing the 'felt sensations' of the problem, together with its historical moment.

Methodology

Not With a Bang But a Whimper is anchored in principles of practice-based research. Australian methodologist, Estelle Barrett argues that research in the visual arts is initiated and driven by the subjective dimension. It operates beyond explicit and exact knowledge, deriving resources from tacit and experiential domains. She argues that art practice is linked to the 'normal processes of living' by the enactment of processes of making and doing as ways of thinking and feeling. Barrett claims that creative critical art practice draws out new knowledge by intensifying day to day experiences (2007: 115). The figurative languages of art grant access to areas of human experience that are otherwise impenetrable using more conventional methods. Visual arts strategies augment the capacity of words to convey affect. Patricia Leavy states that strategies of creative practice can overcome the 'mind/body dichotomy—a barrier to affective forms of knowledge formed in the rationalising mind' (2008: 113). They can interweave with the dialectic processes of critical theory, making them more comprehensive by contributing the sensations that attend the phenomenon under question—to animate, or put human flesh on the bones of a problem. Practice-based research values the subjective experience as a vital resource for the generation of knowledge maintaining that within the personal and subjective experience lie the seeds of the more universally shared.

This project entails a three-part process. First, the identification of an area of experience that is shaped by its particular historical conditions. Second, I test the felt dimensions of my own experience against a more critical appraisal of this problem using the strategies I have developed and refined throughout my art practice. The various creative strategies I use nest under an overarching methodology of Camp. Camp is the idiomatic gay subcultural worldview or suite of survival strategies for negotiating hostile social and cultural landscapes. Third, I reflect upon these outcomes to assess what I have learned by interweaving both a personal and a critical perspective.

Identifying an Historical Moment (Enlisting Gays to Teach Straight Men to Shop)

The launching pad for this project was the encroachment of the ideologies of the economy into the social and cultural world. Specifically, the conscription of gays by the media to further commercialise broader masculinity, the selective, disciplinary distribution of legitimacy, the bolstering of class power and shoring up of hegemonic,

heteronormative masculinity. I focused on *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy,* a lifestyle program first airing in 2003. It was popular among young gay audiences, had high ratings, and clearly embodied the regulatory imperatives of neoliberal capitalism that I proposed underpinned the new legitimacy. American queer theorist Sarah Chinn claims that *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* aimed to remake gays as ‘well groomed, well paid, vaguely but not threateningly political, avatars of good taste, unconflicted about how their identities are indistinguishable from the products they buy’ (2006: 152). The show promoted gays as innately qualified consumers, exemplary compliant citizens who willingly and enthusiastically act as guides for straights through confusing commercial culture. *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* enlisted gay men to perform a pedagogy of neoliberal cultural logic, to reinforce and police class boundaries and promote privatised citizenship centred on consumption. The show’s representations serve as both positive and negative reinforcements in a matrix of neoliberal social control. That is, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* positions gay men to reassure hegemonic masculinity as it undergoes commodification. The show’s hosts serve as effeminate foils to assuage straight men’s anxiety, softening any loss of masculine pride they might feel as they are led into unexplored landscapes of perfume, coiffure, designer clothing and skin care. Gay men are corralled into sanctioned arenas in which they perform the function of useful minstrels. I would use my photographic practice to test these propositions.

I set out to penetrate the unctuous, seductive façade of mediated gay representation to reveal its disciplinary dimensions and to assert the presence of less visible gay sectors—those who were ill-equipped to participate in the levels of consumption demanded by the show.

Camp and the Theatrical

Jack Babuscio ([1977] 1999) explains the centrality of performance to Camp, writing, ‘It can, and often does, lead to a heightened awareness and appreciation for disguise, impersonation, the projection of personality, and the distinctions to be made between instinctive and theatrical behaviour’ (1999: 124). Camp performance requires detachment; the actor invokes an alibi, sheltering behind the pretence of innocence or incomprehension.

Irony is at the core of Camp. What on the surface celebrates the frivolous and seeks merely aesthetic pleasure, on deeper examination is infused with a sadness or rage arising out of the experience of subordination. Camp holds optimism in precarious balance with fatalistic resolution to the inequalities that define subcultural life. Camp upends seriousness and dominant hierarchies of taste by celebrating the tacky, the excessively sentimental, and the kitsch. With these manoeuvres, it euphemises the sting of prejudice in hostile times, by recasting the earnest but inadequate performance in the starring roles. It cultivates wit to act as a salve to life’s ironies, seeming to celebrate the frivolous and the superficial but it does so to form a shield. Camp holds opposites in balance. Queer theorist Phillip Core cites the well-known playwright and filmmaker Jean Cocteau who wrote in 1922, ‘Camp is political. Camp’s subterfuge—ambiguity, coding, and alibi— were used as tools to challenge mainstream values and conventions’ (Core 1984: 9).

I drew on the archetype of the clown while making Not With a Bang But a Whimper. I was drawn to the clown firstly because of a direct relation to the idea of the ‘minstrel,’ and secondly because I had recently discovered (to my delight) that the Mattachine society—the first post-World War Two, American gay-rights organisation—had been named after a group of subversive unmarried jesters of renaissance France (Bronski 2011: 180). I began sorting through the large collection of photographs that I had sourced from the Internet over the years. I found myself returning to one that depicts a trio of clowns holding musical instruments.

Clowns, Internet find, source unknown.

The photograph is old, from early decades of the twentieth century, and the scars of age give it a seductive patina. Of the three clown characters, I found the one on the right most compelling. Something about his expression allowed me to penetrate the make-up and costume and feel as if I could access his subjectivity. I imagined a personal connection which acted as a narrative trigger for me. I found myself drawn into reverie about his life beyond the character he played in the circus ring. His make-up did not seem to obscure his authentic self; a balance was struck in the photograph between fiction and 'truth', between concealment and revelation. I would draw on the clown in this found photograph when designing my character.

Send in the Clown (Developing Character, Mise-En-Scene and Title)

I aimed to use a clown to mimic, invert or exaggerate the formations of neoliberal citizenship promoted by the gay lifestyle hosts on *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) writes about the medieval French author François Rabelais, whose best-known work was a series of five novels recounting the adventures of Gargantua and Pantagruel, a giant and his giant baby son. The work is satirical and uses vulgar imagery of grotesque excess. Gargantua and Pantagruel are exaggerated in every way: their physical presence, their rapacious appetites, and the scale of their vulgarity. They are the clowns that Bakhtin calls the embodiment of the spirit of the carnivalesque, a dissenting but celebratory ancient energy of the people that flows through history, becoming increasingly suppressed under rationalism—the voice and pressure valve of the regulated proletariat. Bakhtin maintains the clown is strongly related to class; the jester, who has the ear of the king, mediates between officialdom and the people; the clown cuts through the pretensions of institutions of governance, exposing them to deflating laughter. The clown seemed a viable character to reveal the regulatory functions of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*.

Bakhtin's glutton/clown embodies the spirit of carnivalesque through exaggeration and excess but I wanted to temper my character with humility so I might more persuasively insinuate my argument upon my audience. Alexander Carpenter writes about the Pierrot character of the commedia dell'arte. While the Pierrot character has origins in renaissance Italy, he was refined later in France. He is a hapless bumpkin, a counterpart to the nimble-witted harlequin. While Pierrot plays the fool, he pokes fun under his breath (2010: 6). According to historian John Rudlin, Pierrot represented the youngest son or lowest-ranking member of the troupe whose performances revolved around his bumbling inexperience and naivety. Because he is a family member, the laughter directed at him is not derisive and his blundering incomprehension and ineptitude often shields his wisdom (1994: 134). This characteristic relationship between knowledge and the pretence of ignorance or incomprehension strongly evokes the calculated duplicity of Camp. I had my little

clown invert the expectations promoted in the media. He makes a valiant attempt to conform to lifestyle television's ideal of neoliberal citizenship. He fusses over his appearance in the mirror, yearns for commodities, cleans, and decorates but his efforts inevitably fail. I aimed that he would be an engaging and ever-optimistic character, never dispensing derision from above—that his critique would seem to be only inadvertently revealed in a collision between what is expected of him and his inability to play that role.

Carpenter notes that in the nineteenth century, the Pierrot had grown into another archetype, that of the artist removed from humanity, exploring his authentic self, paradoxically, by playing a role — 'the confluence of art, self and society' (2010: 7). This figure resonated with me because I felt it evoked those years of introspection when HIV had removed me from society, and I had attempted to make sense of my existence in exile by thinking up performances that I would stage in the studio for my camera. I designed tableaux in which I acted out allegories based on my own observations and interpretations as I attempted to move on from a troubled past. In this series, I wanted to infuse a parody of mediated gay identities with autobiographical narratives — the work would address my own, ultimately representative, processes of recuperation and reconciliation. I would cast myself as my little clown. I rejected explicit makeup for the character, aiming at a balance between subjectivity and fiction that I had experienced in the previously described clown photograph I had found on the internet. The addition of a red nose proved sufficient to shift my character from a portrait to a fiction, and my theatre from a first-person to a third-person narrative.

The backdrop I used throughout the entire series was stained, torn in places, and dotted with bits of hot glue from prior use, producing textures on silver gelatin prints that I knew would be evocative. To further embellish the sets, I introduced random stars and artificial pearls. I had used pearls in the past to reflect the marks left by HIV and to euphemise the physical manifestations of plague in historical allegories. The stars were intended to evoke a sort of 'celestial indifference,' subtly conjuring up our ultimate insignificance while still contributing their decorative qualities, a sort of memento mori to infer the ultimate worthlessness of shiny trinkets, the classed trappings of wealth and privilege. Stars are common in the circus, often serving as decorative designs on performers' costumes and on banners. I intended that these cheap, kitsch embellishments would compete with the rich settings of the mediated representations; tawdry counterpoints to the glamorous vision of affluence and fulfilment that consumerism uses to promote itself. I aimed that tawdry sets and the stars would help enhance a Camp valorisation of inadequacy and earnest bad performance.

I sought to resist two main conventions by which gay artworks are politically neutralised: the expectation that gay artwork will always centre on the sexualised male form, and that gays are innately qualified consumers. In the past, I had used sexualised or homoerotic imagery as a political device, though these strategies had become redundant as masculinity became increasingly commodified. The once forbidden gay male vocabularies of 'beefcake' photography had been depoliticised by their incorporation into mainstream pop cultural languages—they no longer caused offence. Homoerotic imagery now justified a benign condescension that left me feeling trivialised, subject to an ambient heterocentricity that, while not overtly prejudiced, promotes itself through belittling generalisations, such as gay vanity, and gay fixation on the body and promiscuity. The gay male form in art now provided bourgeois, straight audiences with justification of their condescending preconceptions. To resist the assumption spread by the media that gay men are innately and universally bourgeois consumers I used threadbare, sweat-stained

costumes; old dungarees and the iconic blue singlet of the Australian (straight male) worker. The commodity the clown yearns for is a modest, working-class stubby of domestic beer. American sociologist Andrew Ross made an incisive and prescient claim when he wrote that Camp 'reflects a remoteness to, or disqualification from power'. He continues that Camp provides mechanisms for its users to 'express their presence, despite their impotence in a social structure in which they are subordinate, by distancing themselves from conventional bourgeois morality and taste' ([1988] 1999: 317). These strategies allowed me to invert the class-based lifestyle genre representations of gay men and to disrupt the incitement to conform and consume that they embody.

Directing Camp Performance

To shape my clown's performance, I set out to revitalise the traditional gay idiom of Camp which, though difficult to define, infuses gay culture and history. British media theorist Andy Medhurst claims 'camp, as almost every commentator on the subject has ruefully noted, eludes a single, crisp definition; nonetheless, most of us know it when we see, hear, feel or do it. ... It flows like gin and poison through subcultural conversations' (1997: 276). American film theorist Jack Babuscio describes Camp as a distinctly gay sensibility:

> a creative energy reflecting a consciousness that is different from the mainstream; a heightened awareness of certain human complications of feeling that spring from the fact of social oppression; in short, a perception of the world which is coloured, shaped, directed, and defined by the fact of one's gayness ([1977] 1999: 118).

Susan Sontag was a pioneering theorist of Camp whose work remains influential. She introduced a vision of Camp as an ironic worldview that provided homosexuals with solace in their exclusion, using euphemism and fatalism to dull the sting of oppression and by providing them with a means to invert mainstream value coding by valorising bad taste—a suite of strategies that enabled gay men to traverse hostile social terrain in relative safety ([1964] 1999). Activist, academic and entertainer, Moe Meyer frames Camp as a specifically queer praxis, claiming Camp 'is a suppressed and denied oppositional critique embodied in the signifying practices that processually constitute queer identities'. He maintains that Camp is political and that it 'embodies a specifically queer cultural critique'. He also declares that mainstream uses of Camp are only '*acts of appropriation*' (1994: 1). I see an evolving discourse around the role of Camp as central to my practice and to my personality.

Camp has origins in gay male culture though in recent decades it is often reduced to apolitical effeminate affectations performed for the amusement of straight audiences, rather than a subversive suite of survival strategies. Camp, like the term queer, has become a vehicle for straight audiences to demonstrate a self-congratulatory embrace of diversity and to appear au fait with subcultural trappings, all the while ignoring the inequalities that give shape to minority lives.

Babuscio claims that Camp conceives all our social roles as performance, and that it fatalistically acknowledges our inadequacy to perform the role demanded of us by straight society. He writes that Camp reveals itself in those things that give our secret away; we recognise each other in our failings ([1977] 1999: 123). In this way, it appears self-deprecating, though it includes everyone in its roll call of inadequacy. Bad performance is the generative energy of Camp in its quest for success, in what Sontag refers to as 'certain passionate failures' ([1964] 1999). Camp refuses defeat by pre-emptively claiming it. It uses fatalism to acknowledge our own failure

to accomplish anything meaningful in a system that is pitted against us. In Not With a Bang But a Whimper, I drew first on the frameworks of Camp that I learned in the course of my induction into the subculture – the mordant wit of the drag queen; the flamboyant banter, the ironic repartee I had encountered in the gay bars of my youth. I attempted to blend theatricality, failed performance, kitsch, sentimentality, mockery veiled by strategic incomprehension and alibi into meaningful and political allegorical tableaux.

My clown character sets out to parody the hierarchies of taste that underpin the 'soft' or subjectifying, controlling authority of the media in the neoliberal cultural environment. Despite his efforts to conform, my earnest clown inevitably fails to live up to the expectations the media demands of gay men. He is inadequate for the role in which he has been cast. Sontag calls Camp a sensibility of failed seriousness—it loves the loser; she calls Camp a type of love ([1964] 1999: 62). The Pierrot clown's earnest optimism, and seeming obliviousness to the problems he critiques, mesh with Camp's alibi of incomprehension.

The tattered, stained costumes of my character invert the expectations of class on which gay visibility and legitimacy in the media is conditional. The clown's drag uses inversion and exaggeration to mock the commercial subtexts of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. The red plastic nose as the sole overtly clownish element of costuming appears superficial and off-hand when, in fact, it strategically activates Camp alibis of fiction. The nose absolves the performer of consequences of the critique he makes—off stage, without his costume and his mask, the clown disappears. The clown acts as decoy for the delivery of dissent.

Concluding Discussion (Lived Experience Cast Against its Historical Moment)

Over the years, I have come to think of my approach to making photographs as a sort of dialectical theatre that I use to refine a position within an historical moment in light of my experience and observations. I identify a broadly held, dominant assumption that impacts upon my life and I use metaphor and allegory to situate it in a theatrical, propositional space. My characters serve as proxies, letting me inhabit other vantages and to test alternative viewpoints. Performance lets me cultivate and closely focus on the affect a problem causes. American art historian Ernst van Alphen writes 'Art is a laboratory where experiments are conducted that shape thought into visual and imaginative ways of framing the pain points of culture' (van Alphen: 2005: xiii). A place where tacitly felt knowledge is assessed against what is cognitively understood.

When I began Not With a Bang But a Whimper, I see now that my interpretation of gay legitimacy was a strident one in which 'evil capitalists had found new ways to subjugate and exploit minorities'. Designing characters and making tableaux photographs forced me to focus on the lived sensations of the phenomenon, leading me to realise that the problem is more complex than I initially thought.

I started the series by making photographs that would represent gay cultural assimilation, but by incorporating my own biography and reflecting upon it through performance I came to unexpected and uncomfortable conclusions. I began to recognise that below my public skin, deep within my private consciousness, lurked unresolved issues lingering from the HIV years. I cultivated these submerged feelings, striving to articulate them in physical form, to view them more clearly and to better understand them. While HIV had once taken my future, drugs had given it back, but throughout this experience I had been distracted from the inevitability of growing old. My reconciliation with the mainstream world was causing me to

confront mortality again, but this time it was not the prospect of illness and early death that frightened me, but the slow, withering atrophy of age. This realisation led me to consider generational rifts. I wondered what would happen to the gay culture of my youth as it is increasingly assimilated into a hyper commercialised, legitimate mainstream. I confessed to myself that there was something exciting and eternally romantic about the 'outsider'. I wondered if sexual preference became incidental as a definitive of identity, would gay identities and cultures be relegated to history's Wunderkammer? It was these revelations and the questions arising out of the production of Not With a Bang But a Whimper that led me to begin working on my next series, Oblivion.

End Notes

1. From Saturday the ninth of December 2017, the right to marry in Australia was no longer determined by sex or gender. The Marriage Act of 1961 was amended to read 'the union of two people to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life', ensuring all couples were afforded the same rights (Trove n.d).

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'Hang On To Your Dreams', 2004 Ray Cook.

'From the Cradle to the Grave', 2004 Ray Cook.

'It Pays to Look Your Best', 2004 Ray Cook.

'Reconfiguring the Constellations in the Night Sky of my Youth', 2004 Ray Cook.

'Sweeping the Sad Things Out the Door', 2004 Ray Cook.

PORTRAITS OF DISSENT AND A MANIFESTATION OF SURVEILLANCE

With Adam Ferguson's permission, this is an exerpt from his Blog, TIME and The New York Times. As we publish this issue Adam Ferguson is in Ukraine to 'photograph the war devastating the country and its people' (Ferguson 2022). His photodocumentary and photojournalism has mainly been on consignment while travelling, often to areas of conflict and unrest. This gallery presentation consists of Ferguson's photographs of the student-led protests in Hong Kong in 2019. Websites are provided to view more of Adam Ferguson's work — editors.

ADAM FERGUSON – Photographing Hong Kong's student protesters

In 2019, student-led protests erupted in Hong Kong after the Chinese government proposed a bill to allow extradition to China, another attempt to control the supposedly autonomous Hong Kong—control that has now largely been secured nearly two years later.

I covered the 2014 'Umbrella Movement' protests in Hong Kong for *The New York Times*. Student protesters used umbrellas to protect themself from police pepper spray and staged sit-ins on the street, dressed in black, backdropped by skyscraper shrines of capitalism and free-market economics.

These protests were mostly peaceful. Organised groups handed out water and cleaned the streets afterward. I remember joking with other photographers as we looked across a sea of people dressed in black that it was like being at a Radiohead concert.

2019 was different. Tear gas wafted from Kowloon to Central Hong Kong as protesters waged guerrilla war with the police like neo-punk gladiators. They dressed again in black, but this time wore gas masks, elbow pads, face masks, and chest pads.

There was an urgency to their cause—the war cry was 'be water'. Students would surge through the streets, dissipate and surge again, voting for their movements democratically in real-time on the app Telegram. They would come together in streets and alleys, modern shopping malls, and the MTR, Hong Kong's gleaming subway system, before disappearing again. It was surreal for me to turn away from the protests and grab dinner among bankers and tourists—internationals in Hong Kong's prosperous free-market ecosystem—then walk five blocks and duck tear-gas canisters again.

As I photographed the protests for *TIME magazine*, I realised I wasn't just witnessing a protest movement that represented Hong Kong youths' discontent with an authoritarian China, I was also seeing the future of protest. These young people in Hong Kong symbolised the modern protester. They showed how dissent will unfold against power in the future—protesters hiding and adopting guerrilla tactics instead of standing publicly for a cause.

The difference I saw between this movement and previous protests is that technology and surveillance had heightened the threat of retribution. Protesters could be identified by the Chinese government and charged retroactively, and many feared that facial recognition would be used to identify and arrest them. So the protesters operated in anonymity, wearing masks and helmets for safety—and to conceal their identity. More than five thousand protesters were arrested by the end of 2019; since then, a national security law has resulted in more arrests.

The situation inspired me to make a set of portraits that could discuss the situation in Hong Kong beyond the spectacle of tear gas and skirmishes in the streets. I pitched this project to my editor Andrew Katz at *TIME*; we decided I would photograph protesters in a studio and obscure their identities through lighting and poses, as well as their protective equipment and clothing.

I needed to set a tone with studio lighting that felt appropriate to the issue I was photographing. My experience on the street informed these decisions, seeing protestors hide from police in alleys or huddle in groups looking at their cell phones, dimly lit by street lights. LCD screens in shop windows or from billboards kept coming back to me. The ambient street light I had seen was low-key with a soft fill light from the electronic light sources. The quality of this light is what I tried to replicate in the studio.

On shoot day one, something happened that I hadn't anticipated. When the first protesters stood under the lights, they were so obscured by their attire that the portraits lacked any human elements. It was photographing props rather than idealistic young students. I was failing to articulate the comment on state surveillance and the people it affected. The photo below is one that I considered a failure; it was never published or chosen by *TIME*. This photo failed in my eyes because it looks like a statue devoid of struggle and feelings. There are no signifiers to connect the protest paraphernalia to the plight of the protester.

Adam Ferguson studied photography at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Australia. After graduating, he travelled from port to port through the Caribbean and Mediterranean as crew on a sailboat to fund the start of his photographic career.

Ferguson first gained recognition for his work in 2009 when he embarked on a sustained survey of the US-led war in Afghanistan. Since that time he has worked

internationally with a focus on conflict, contributing to *The New York Times Magazine*, *TIME Magazine* and *National Geographic*, amongst others.

Over the years he has been the recipient of awards from World Press Photo, Pictures of the Year International (POYI), Photo District News, National Portrait Gallery of Australia, and American Photography, and his photographs have been included in several solo and group exhibitions worldwide.

He lives in Brooklyn, New York and is working on two monographs: A war diary of his time in Afghanistan and a survey of the Australian outback.

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An antigovernment protester is arrested near the Tsim Sha Tsui police station in Kowloon, Hong Kong, on August 11, Adam Ferguson for *TIME* (Solomon 2019).

'We front liners are just a group of students, born in Hong Kong. We have no training or professional knowledge. I won't reveal how much I've escalated my use of violence, or any future plans, but I absolutely will not back down' — Sylvia, 23, Adam Ferguson for *TIME* (Barron 2020).

'I've tasted tear gas. I've been hit by a rubber bullet. I set roadblocks. No one taught me, I just saw people do it and I tried to help. I feel nervous. I can't be scared, though, because I stand in the front lines and people stand behind me. I need to protect them. Some of them are younger than me' — Zita, 16, Adam Ferguson for *TIME (*Barron 2020*).*

"I study public administration. Initially I considered joining the government — to change them by becoming part of them. But that's too naïve. We have to do something outside the system like we're doing now. If we join the system, there will only be two outcomes. Firstly, I will be destroyed by the system. Secondly, nothing happens and I am assisting the system, helping it to become worse' — Matthew, 22, Adam Ferguson for TIME (Barron 2020).

'At the start of the movement, I was a peaceful protester. But after one million, two million people marched on the streets and the government didn't respond, I decided to join the camp of more radical protesters. We won't give up because we have already started on this path of no return. We believe that we cannot lose this time' — Kelvin, 20, Adam Ferguson fo*r TIME (*Barron 2020*).*

'It is scary to be on the front lines, but that's not going to stop me from protecting the people behind me, from protecting Hong Kong. Even though I wasn't born until after 1997, I can see with my own eyes that Hong Kong is sinking. It is moving backwards' — Ben, 20, Adam Ferguson for *TIME (*Barron 2020*).*

'I joined the front line at the end of September. A lot of us have been arrested. Being arrested is not that scary. I am just worried what will happen if we lose this protest ... I really love this place. It has loved me for 19 years, and if it takes me 10 years in prison to save Hong Kong, then I am willing to do this' — Edison, 19, Adam Ferguson for *TIME (*Barron 2020*).*

'Only when there is chaos in society does the government pay some attention to our demands. I think that all police are the same. Maybe I hate them too much, but I think that whatever protesters do, whether they slash their necks or whatever, I think there's no problem' — Jane, 21, Adam Ferguson for *TIME (*Barron 2020*).*

PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAITURE: EVERYONE HAS A STORY

Since its beginning, portrait photography has captured the life and times of people. Originally, an important tool for the portrait photographer was a neck brace to hold the sitter(s) head in place in order to get a sharp exposure, which would have been very uncomfortable for the sitter. The brace was necessary as the lens had to be open for a long period of time to capture the photograph on glass and then later on film. Despite development it was not until the latter 1900s that new technology brought fast film to both the professional and amateur photographer, ushering in a new era of portrait photography. Accordingly, a long history of creative portraiture developed alongside the faster film technology, contributing to the birth of photo-art practice and producing many iconic experimental portraits.

Presented here are a series of portraits I photographed over a period of about seven years, guided by the theme of 'everyone has a story'. We all have events and happenings in our lives that are either a sad or a happy story to tell. These portraits aim to convey the subject's identity, personality or emotional state, or to tell a story, through a mixture of constructionist methodology, and/or a conceptual idea and/or the candid/opportunistic methods.

Constructionist portraiture involves a creative process such as instructing the sitter to pose in a certain way to affect atmosphere or an emotional response. The portrait of 'Brett' [page 84] is a constructed portrait where the sitter was guided to scream, to reflect his feelings about the sexual abuse he suffered when young. The rose petals were later added in using Photoshop to reflect the healing that can come from expressing his pain. The constructionist approach taken with 'Brett' differs from that of the portrait of 'Laura' [page 85]. In this case, it is not intended as a true characterisation of the sitter but rather a concept aimed at paying tribute to the Russian all-girl activist punk band 'Pussy Riot'. The band had come to the attention of the Russian authorities, so the girl band members wore balaclavas when performing. One of the band members tells a harrowing story of incarceration and of escaping Russia before Putin rounded up the 'dissidents'. Both 'Brett' and 'Laura' are conceptual narrative fine-art photographic portraits created to tell a factual story.

As noted above, with conceptual photography, a portrait may not necessarily aim to depict the character of the person being photographed, but rather the sitter is the canvas for the artist to tell a story or to make a comment about a social or cultural issue. Another example is the image 'No Words Needed' that is also included in a more recent project, 'How do You Feel About the World ATM?'. For this image, my friend agreed to put a black sheer stocking over his head in order to disguise his features, but not his true feelings [page 86]. This photo-art portrait aims to portray to the viewer an anxious feeling about our current world situation.

Environmental portraiture is another approach to portraiture, falling somewhere between traditional and lifestyle portraits. Annie Leibovitz, one of America's most famous photographers, is known for her portraiture of celebrities, depicting them in a variety of environments from studio to more intimate settings. Leibovitz maintains that the environment or surroundings for the portrait are an important part of the shot. Portraits can be taken in real life settings, or in studios or set up to look like real places. They are either taken indoors or outdoors, more often being artificially lit using a flash or studio lights. Leibovitz would spend time researching and getting to know the person before the shoot: sometimes she was on set with short notice.

Her ability to understand and read her sitter continues to produce stunning portraits that resonate with the viewer. She may pose her subjects, and at the same time take random shots while talking to the sitter.

Conceptual photography can be more imaginative than other kinds of portrait photography and may involve image manipulations and Photoshop edits to further convey the concept.

This type of portraiture often overlaps with fine art photography, which describes much of my portrait photography. I entered my photography in the annual Sydney HeadOn Photo Festival portrait awards and achieved finalist in 2015 and semi-finalist in 2016 and 2017. The 2017 HeadOn semi-finalist was one of my most interesting sitters, ‘Rosalie’ [page 92], whose portrait was also exhibited in 2016 at the Sirona Fine Art Gallery in Chicago. This wonderful artistic character showed her love for her pet rats and her creativity and by designing a costume made from her personal belongings for the photo shoot. The finalist image, ‘Sleeping Man’, [page 90] was an opportunistic photograph of a relative: we capture those who are close around us who can be photographed anytime day or night. The ‘Sleeping Man’ portrait was exhibited in Sydney, New York and India and presents the vulnerable self when sleeping.

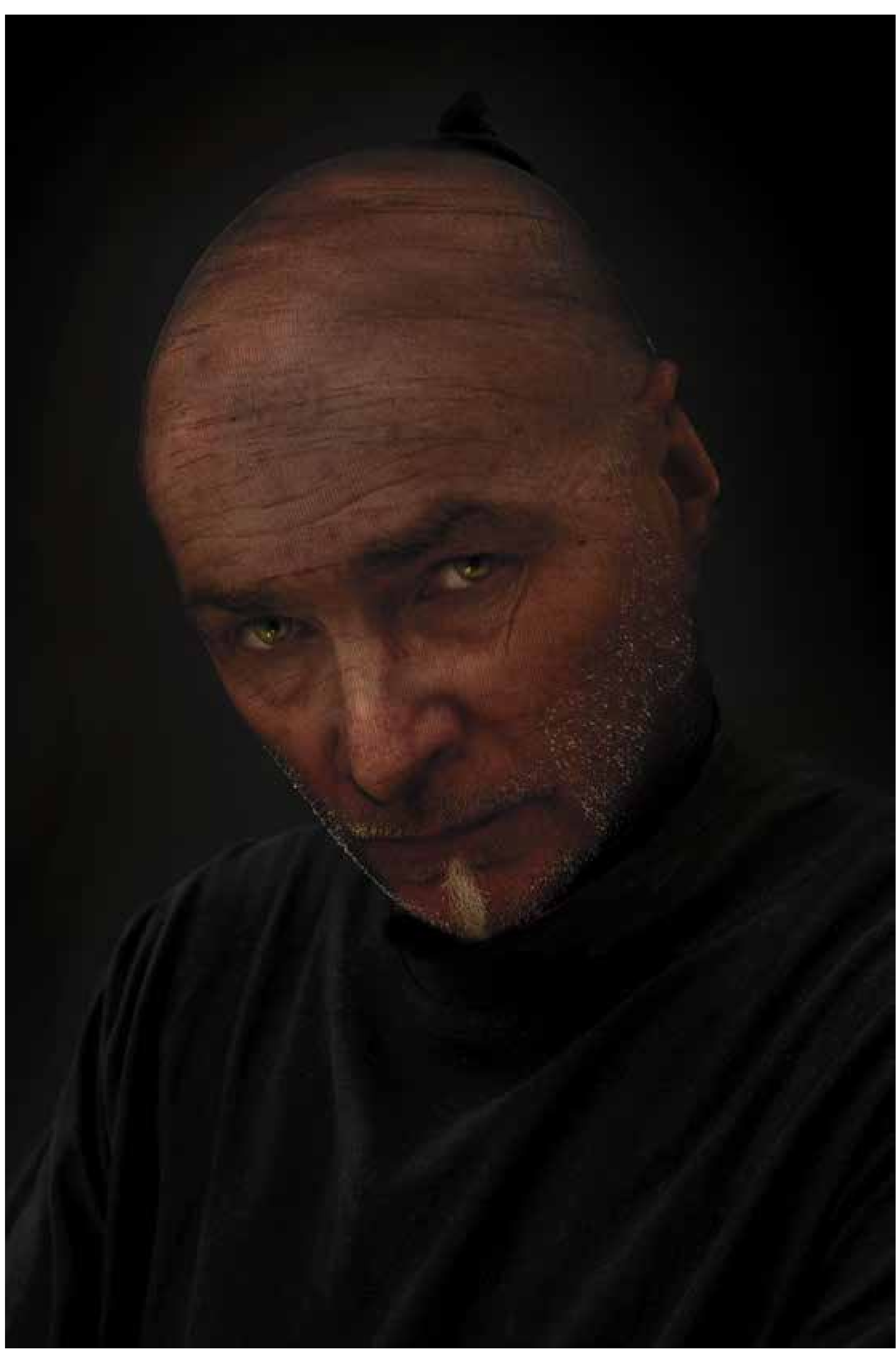
Semi-finalist portrait, ‘Family’, [page 91] is a photograph of my relatives taken in the early evening light: the glow from the iPad portrays a sensitive, intimate moment with family members. Particularly for family members, portraits can bring back memories and help connect us to the past to give us a sense of belonging. We automatically document mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and extended family through the various events in our lives. A photographer is always looking for the perfect candid opportunities, and these can often show an intimate relationship between family sitter(s) and photographer, and with other family members. Family members tend to relax and will often ignore the camera despite being aware of it, while the photographer can also be more relaxed, more revealing and able to capture the moment. This situation provides opportuniies for the photographer to create opportunistic or candid portraits.

Photography can be a hit and miss journey, especially when you are travelling light and you only have your camera and no lighting set-up, so you need to work with the environment that is in front of you. Candid photographs are not structured – they are opportunistic. The portrait session with ‘Gerard’ [page 87] was to be the last one, as he passed away from cancer complications soon after this portrait was taken. The photograph was both random and structured. Gerard was an avid wildlife photographer who lived in a caravan with an annexe. The annexe had a window which I suggested would be the best frame for the portrait: that his canine companions were eager to be a part of the photo is a random event. When photographing at our local show I seized the opportunity when this worker, [page 88] who was taking a short break from his work, allowed me to photograph him – similarly the portrait of a man with his prize chicken at their local poultry show [page 89]. Photographic portraiture helps us remember, it captures the memory of that time and of social and cultural facets of people around the world. I consider how powerful a photograph is as I remember the circumstances around each portrait I have taken.

Light is a key factor when photographing portraits. How I use light is important for conveying emotion through tone, mood and atmosphere. The creative use of lighting can change the viewer’s perception about the sitter(s). I can shape the face/body with studio or natural light to appear either soft or harsh or to focus the light by asking the sitter to pose in a certain way so it will fall on certain areas of the face. Either way the importance of producing a successful portrait is understanding how natural or studio light works. Creative lighting is the key to conveying how an audience will perceive the person being photographed. It is the photographer’s view. In this Series, I have used creative lighting extensively in these constructed, conceptual and/or opportunistic photographs to produce my portraiture.

'Brett', 2019 Debra Livingston. The use of rose petals came from listening to Brett's harrowing story. His last attempt at suicide was by running at a train as a release from his past abuse. He survived, but spent many months in hospital and rehabilitation. One of the symbols for roses is 'courage' and the flying petals, for me, is a statement to give him courage and hope to heal his pain.

'Laura Lipstick', 2014 Debra Livingston. This concept portrait was created in response to an all-girl activist band 'Pussey Riot' in support of their bravery to take action against the Russian regime. The balaclava was handmade from flower-patterned material and the lipstick is to signify their femininity whilst hiding their identity.

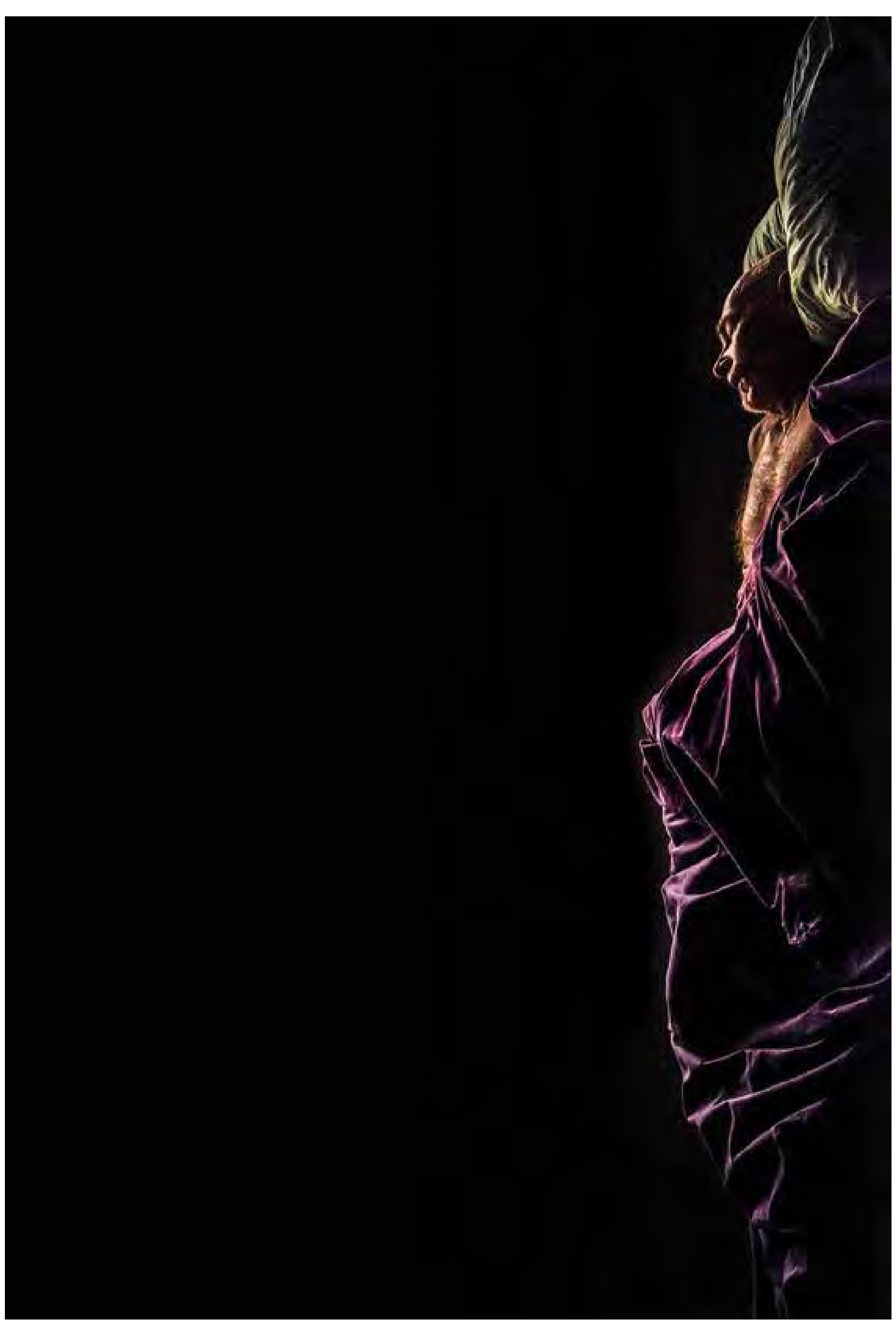


'No Words Needed: How do You Feel About the World ATM?', 2021 Debra Livingston. I discussed with my friend the aim for the portrait, He agreed to put a black sheer stocking over his head in order to produce a more menacing feel to the final portrait. The photograph is meant to feel uneasy to communicate that we are living in a challenging world. The concept is to capture the portrait as the person responds to the question, 'how do you feel about the world at the moment?'

'Gerard', 2016 Debra Livingston. This was the second portrait shoot of Gerard. I was not happy with the first shoot, I needed to look further to find the perfect backdrop and framing for a portrit that would honour this now deceased gentleman. As a avid photographer he would pull a shopping trolley full of equipment almost every day on the local university grounds to photograph nature, mainly insects. He has photographed insect species that have not yet been identified or classified.

'Show Worker', 2016 Debra Livingston. This portrait of a show worker is a photograph of chance. You find a lot of interesting characters at your local rural show. Most working show people do not mind their photograph being taken. I always make sure I ask the person, albeit you get a posed portrait, although the narrative is about the people, the characters that seem to be culturally unique as is their trade.

'Winner', 2016 Debra Livingston. I asked a friend if I could come to their poultry club show. I waited all day to get a limited edition photographic series of the people who kept show chickens. When the award presentations finished people were in a hurry to get their poultry and go home. It was a long day, but the proud winners were happy to pause a moment for a portrait although, I did manage to capture a few people with their chickens under their arms on the way out of the building.



'Sleeping Man', 2015 Debra Livingston. This photogrpah of a sleeping man was by chance captured when the light was highlighting the doona in the early morning. I used a very high ISO as the rest of the room was quite dark. This portrait acheived finalist 2015 in the HeadOn Portrait Awards held in Sydney, NSW. 'Sleeping Man' was exhibited in New York and India in 2016 and 2017.

'Family', 2015 Debra Livingston. This candid portrait of my family was taken when the light was fading on Christmas Day 2014 when the grandchildren started playing with my iPad; when everyone came together I saw an opportunity to capture a beautiful family portrait. The light is from the iPad. It was a chance shot as it could have been unsuccessful due to the subdued light and hand holding a mirrorless camera. This portrait achieved semi-finalist in the HeadOn Portrait awards in 2016.

'Princess Rose', 2015 Debra Livingston. This portrait of Rosalie was exhibited at the Sirona Art Gallery in Chicago in 2016; it was also semi-finalist in the HeadOn Portrait awards in 2015. I managed to capture her active pet rats as she very fondly holds one of her favourites; we garnished the costume from Rosalie's art material collection.

AUTHOR/PHOTOGRAPHER

Dr Debra Livingston is a photo-media artist, and lectured in photography at the Queensland College of Art and the University of the Sunshine Coast. She practises both traditional and conceptual methods of photography with an emphasis on narrative and biographical concepts. Her work is presented in solo and collaborative exhibitions locally in Queensland, nationally in Melbourne and Sydney, and internationally in New York (NYC), Florida, Chicago, Paris and India. Her work resides in private and public collections. Published in Poets and Artists, Livingston has achieved honorary mentions in the PX3 Paris Photography Awards, finalist and semi finalist in the annual Australian HeadOn Foundation Photographic Portrait Awards, Sydney, Australia and finalist in the International Brisbane Art Prize.

'Lisa Prowd', 2019 Jody Haines, (see 'a Cuppa and a Yarn' page 44).

'The End of the World', 2004 Ray Cook, (see 'Not with a Bang but a Whimper', page 60).

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