

Question 5: From the Lens-Based Image Making research strand lectures, choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists that relate to your practice or interests, and construct a 2,500-word essay. Critically assess primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioners.

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Photography in the Arts

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The Darkroom: How does an experience affect an individual theoretically and psychologically?

How does atmosphere change an experience? Atmosphere within this investigation is from a personal phenomenological viewpoint and includes the individual interaction with the space of the darkroom and the psychological connotations of the space. The space that one inhabits is influential on so many levels and this is particularly true of my experiences with the darkroom. We often question the understanding of processing, resources and materials that are revealed into creating a new symbolic meaning, not just for photography, but for a personal experience.

There have been several mediums used to develop images throughout photographic history, and when Kodak camera was first introduced in 1888, celluloid film was then manufactured in 1889 (PhotoBlog. 2017). Photographic film is one part of what is needed for creating a print in the darkroom, photographic paper, an enlarger, photographic chemicals, and importantly, a safelight, however, you may be wondering why is it red?

The darkroom, a room designed for printing photographs in a traditional way, requires complete darkness apart from a red light, known as a 'safe light'. It allows you to handle the light-sensitive materials necessary to make traditional darkroom prints, Stephan and Rachel Kaplen displayed an article on TCPI Lighting Solutions, *The Psychological Impact of Light and Colour* (2017), which states that lights can create visual effects, such as images, shapes, intensity, perception, and contrast, and can biologically and psychologically effect the impact of your health and wellbeing of humanity.

In a form of semiotics, red has been known to have a negative connotation with certain contexts of psychological aspects of the colour spectrum. Often the use of colour represents autism, for example, showing how red is most common to label 'autism' as supported by John et al (2011) from a personal context, it can have multiple effects on the human brain. Additionally, 'the darkroom' has many aspects to its aesthetics features, not just for photographic purposes, it also replicates the elaborate darkness within the space and the state of tranquillity in a form of sensuality. Furthermore, Esther Teichmann's *Falling into Photography: On Loss Desire and the Photographic* (2011), examines the relationship between loss, desire, and imaginary across photographic work such as film, moving into the imagined space whilst exploring the boundaries between autobiography and fiction within the alternate world. In relation to my own aesthetics within the darkroom, this body of text clarifies a mesmerising concept of an imagined space and moment presented within a natural and emotional context:

The darkroom gives birth to the material photograph within the space of a red night, within a space of liquid, altered temporarily, an unstable space of inverted, luminous non-fixity; a feminine, material space. It is an enclosed space we enter, stepping from the light of day and a linear temporarily, into this other parallel modality of time.

Here, the past and present collapse into the futural. What seems about to appear and perhaps eclipse itself, appears only to disappear, promising a re-finding of that which has been lost, thus requiring a work of mourning at every moment. Bathed in the silent darkness of night, half-light of red liquid, we see differently here, half-blinded, there is clarity within the inverted, hovering projection, within the floating shivering movement of image appearing upon its material support.

(Teichmann, 2011, p.82)



Figure 1: United from Fractal Scars, Salt Water and Tears, 2012-2014.

Contextually, the darkroom is one of the sacred places on my list; It is a complete space to process information, to have the red light reflect on the pain and emotion, where I can focus on my passion and crank my music up to 100, looking away from every feature, the stresses of modern-day politics, the environment, even social media, and people. Your mind wonders on a constant ticking clock, focusing on key elements, putting cogs into action until they burn, constructing ways of developing an understanding of time and the impact it has on the individual.

Traditional methods can often lead into various directions, you start on one experimentation, and time eventually catches up with you, that is usually based on the concept of space. Theoretically, space is

often referred to within many aspects of photography, landscape is an example often demonstrated, in this case it is the concept of subjective, where space is represented through the individual's meaning.

This relationship is described within *The Concept of Space* (2014), where Nicholas Entrikin explores this theory by dividing the concept into two aspects, subjective and objective. Subjectively a dimension embraces an individual's meaning to the place, which levels to a form of representation, whereas the objective denotes the 'naturalistic qualities of the place itself' Entrikin (1991). Regarding the in-betweenness of places, it is the meeting point for both the subjective and objective space, places where meanings and reality are encountered. Space is both an emotional and behavioural bubble, the invisibility surrounds our bodies and spatial organization in terms of shape, such as a house, buildings, villages, cities, regions, nations, and even small spaces.

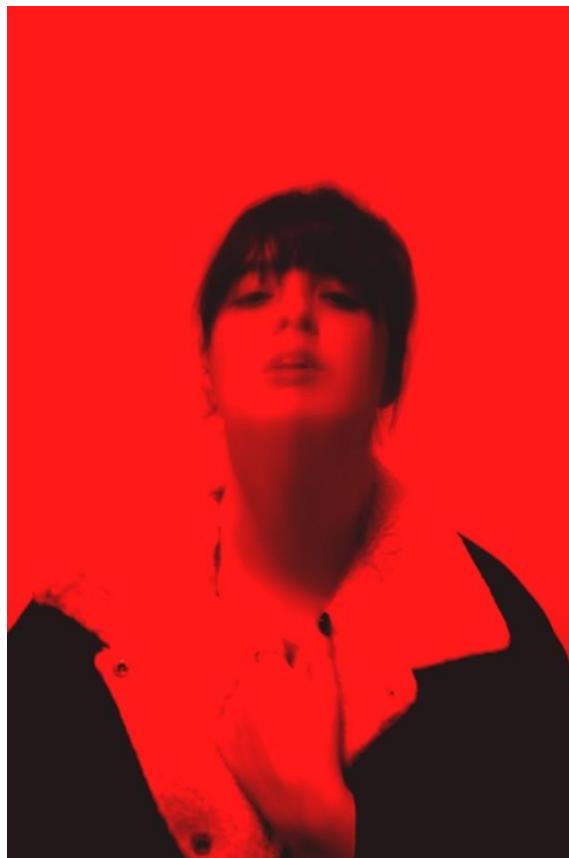


Figure 2: Desire.

Your mind wonders endlessly constructing ways of developing an understanding of time and its impact within significant space. I am often fascinated by the outcome of film; loose particles are left scattered across negatives it can often occur when the chemicals are not fully developed. Additionally, there can be problems with the negatives themselves, anything can happen with traditional processing. When it comes to personal aesthetics, I feel that it is important to talk through your concepts, every aspect of your work are scales of meanings, semiotic intertextuality and completely outside of this digestive space, where cognition is developed through experimentation.

My great-grandfather drew me into the art of photography, as a child you are often fascinated by objects which look distraught, from tales foretold my concentration was drawn to his Pentax UC-1 analogue camera, this is echoed through John Berger who states that "Between the moment recorded and the present moment of looking at the photograph. there is an abyss" (1982). My great grandfather reached to show me the connection was instant; the 'click', the unknown expectations of what might emerge, the depth of knowledge absorbed encourages fascination within the aesthetics, which made my love for film and photography grow with passion.

Occasionally, there are times where the development of black and white analogue photography has a pause of reflection. From the first momentous occasion the fascination began with Michael Curitz's *Casablanca* (1942), a tale of conflict, romance, and dedication that shows a classic moment in history presented in heart-stopping black and white filmography. As a young teenager, it was a period of browsing through time and the creation and development of cinematography as "the 'film stills' are designed to create a space for curiosity and engage the viewer's memory and fantasies of cinema" (Sutton, 2010). This is often the very thing we seek from sources of on-screen motion pictures, an escape in virtual reality transferring the emotion onto what is not there.



Figure 3: Yu Zhun with his mother, 1979

Walking back into the darkroom, the focus is changed to the intense concept of time and how it slowly feels as if we are moving into the universe. Like the photographic negative that can only be developed to reveal the context, the traces it leaves are imprints written and left behind in the past, present, and future, and it all comes back to time. Consider the image within the writings of Walter Benjamin flashing up the vanishing into darkness, the context referring to the transition of light and darkness. When you experience a concept such as darkness there is a possibility of engaging a distinctive kind of memory, stories of narratives of the red night, our eyes are open and sight is another concept, however, as we project and enlarge the images we try to remember and forget.

The texts and performances of memory indicate the ways in which visual media, such as film and photography are engaging, producing, and embody a distinctive sort of memory-stories and narrative discourses for which “the possibility – through forgetting yourself – of recording in a fraction of a second the emotion of the subject, and the beauty of the form; that is, a geometry awakened by what’s offered” (Cartier-Bresson, 1999). Through the sequences of relations between the personal and the

collective, they may be unravelled by examining it in a manner that is both scientifically robust and crucially involved.

When it comes to the truth anything can be said when it come to the photograph and the photographed, the absence of relationship is discussed by Pierre Mac Orlan where he writes "the power of photography consists in creating sudden death. The camera's click suspends life in an act that the developed film reveals as its essence" (1930). This text within itself evokes the photograph being revealed to an extent for what is no longer there, and even that notion can be powerful within itself, the aspect of seeing nothing. There is another important difference within the times contained by the two kinds of images, however, the photographic narrative forms a place before the task of memory, continuously resuming a life being lived in this world. An event such as memory and photographic narratives is a precise nature of an experimental aspect of energy and attraction in the form of contrast, conflict, and an equivalence.

Sometimes there is always that one single event which can be so rich in its facets that it is necessary to move all around, searching for the solution to problems posing for the world's movement as you cannot be stationary in your attitude towards something that is moving. Sometimes you might come upon the picture in seconds; it might also require hours or days before something is revealed from magic we do not understand. You must always be on the alert with your mind, your eye, your heart, and have a suppleness of body. Sometimes you have that feeling that you have already taken the strongest possible picture of a situation or scene; however, you find yourself compulsively shooting at anything you would never consider, because you cannot be sure in advance exactly how the situation or the scene will unfold within the negative, that is the intent of analogue processing, to discover what is underneath.



Figure 4: Red influences Darkroom Prints.

You must stay within the scene just in case the elements of the situation shoot off from the core, meaning, you always must remain focused and prepared for anything, otherwise, you might turn back and realise the scene is not what is once was, something could be different, a person out of place, the weather making a sudden change, anyone of these could be altered:

Even if this dysfunction is recuperated by society as a tragic (silent, God provides no possibility of choosing between signs) or a poetic (the panic 'shudder of meaning' of the Ancient Greeks) game; in the cinema itself, traumatic images are bound up with an uncertainty (an anxiety) concerning the meaning of objects or attitudes.

(Barthes, 1977. p. 39)

The photographer must make sure, while he is still in the presence of the unfolding scene in its entirety, for afterwards, it is too late. He is never able to wind the scene backward to photograph it all over again. Contextually, analogue is an instinctive application, a thirty-two frame per second, the energy in motion, the reel of film running through time, a sequence that has become a coexistence within the field of memory.

Photographers deal with the concepts of retrospective imagery continuously vanishing, and when they vanish, there is no contrivance on this earth that can make them come back together as it is not possible to develop and print a memory. The photographer has time to reflect on what happens, the magic of the gaze. If we reflected on one individual, Ryan L. Moule, *'Seasons over the Liquid World'* (2019), works through the idea of memory, tradition, loss, and uncertainty, the beliefs that are inherited and hard to engage.

The precarious flora, the rock formations, and the beckoning of the cave entrances point to something more intriguing and meaningful (Lear, 2015), this work is typically the same process as developing analogue images. Moule does not fix his photographs to include the suspense of fading overtime within the light, therefore, a red light is involved to keep the photographs from deconstructing. These bloodshot visions move us away from human time, the lifespan of images remains, man's endeavour, towards geological time, the time of the sea, the cliffs, and the earth.



Figure 5: A Red Darkroom Safelight, and Chemically unfixed silver gelatin photographed installations.

In conclusion, for an individual it is impossible to do the story again, if we had a chance, it would most likely be different. We cannot manipulate reality while shooting, just like we cannot manipulate the results in a darkroom. These are tricks which take patience to those who have eyes to see. It is very rare that a photograph is composed and can be saved by reconstruction of its composition under the darkroom's enlarger as the integrity of vision is no longer there. Divisible Remainder (2015) gives us an insight into Flusser who tells us that "any criticism of technical images must be aimed at an elucidation of the inner workings" of the black box, otherwise "we remain illiterate" of photographs and their capacity to control the unexpected. The conclusive evidence is the finished photographic print; otherwise, there would be no end to the number of tales photographers would talk about, the development which is merely a memory in the eye of the nostalgia.

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Figures:

Figure 1: Teichmann, E. (2014) *Untitled from Fractal Scars, Salt Water and Tears*. [online] Flowers Gallery, London. Flowers. Available at: <https://www.flowersgallery.com/artists/161-esther-teichmann/works/147404/> (Accessed 25 Oct. 2021)

Figure 2: Pemberton, S. (2021) *Desire*. [photography]. Portrait. Swansea. (Accessed 21 Nov. 2021)

Figure 3: Kuhn, A. (1979) *Yu Zhun with his mother, 1979*. [online] Memory Studies. Available at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/30696407.pdf> (Accessed 23 Nov. 2021)

Figure 4: Pemberton, S. (2020) *Red Influences Darkroom Print*. [Photography] Swansea. (Accessed 25 Nov. 2021)

Figure 5: Moule, R. (2019) *Chemically unfixed silver gelatin photographs, red darkroom safelight. Installation view, Flower Gallery*. [photography]. Available at: <https://www.ryanmoule.com/Selected-Works> (Accessed 29 Nov. 2021)