

from REPRESENTATION to AFFECT

Martin Bush

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Drivers 3 Praxis Report
MA Contemporary Dialogues: Fine Art

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Note to reader

This thesis includes two distinct voices: an academic voice which adopts the conventions of critical discourse and an autoethnographic voice which articulates an affective response to the ideas presented in the text. The autoethnographic voice in the thesis will operate outside the stylistic conventions adopted for academic reflection.

The visual journey of this MA praxis can be traced at: martmawork.blogspot.co.uk

Introduction

In Jean Cocteau's film, *Orpheus*, the angel Heurtebise confides: 'Watch yourself your whole life in a mirror and you will see Death at work, as you see bees behind the glass in a hive.' (*Orphée*, 1950)

Often quoted by Francis Bacon, this succinctly sums up my praxis. The creative practice I have embarked on has been a journey to expose mortality, explore the continual deterioration and fluidity of the flesh, confront the inescapable torment of identity, and disrupt the photographic moment. This praxis research is concerned with the human condition and is an attempt to understand the/ my self. This research has specifically grappled with the genre of the self-portrait which it may be argued is one of the cornerstones of art history and practice. The portraiture generated throughout this research considers ideals, archetypes, the grotesque and the 'ugly'. It considers the notion of performance through both the still and moving image, in an attempt to challenge representation and replace it with what Deleuze and Guattari describe as 'the molecular "beneath" the molar.' (O' Sullivan, 2001: 26).

The self-portraits produced during this research not only present us with an opportunity to discuss the subject of appearance, but also allows us to consider a potential assault on our nervous system. This retinal focus is considered alongside the work's affectual qualities, therefore, the content of this praxis oscillates between representation and affect.

As a starting point, and in order to get a more complete understanding of my work, it is worthwhile, at least very briefly, to consider where this praxis sits within an art historical context. There are a wide variety of practitioners that have exerted an influence on my work such as Roger Ballen, Andrei Tarkovsky, Anselm Kiefer, Tony Oursler, David Lynch, Francesca Woodman, Gregory Crewdson, Bill Viola and Nadav Kander. It is practical at this point to highlight just a few of whom I consider to be the most influential with a brief preface.

The work of Francis Bacon has in many ways been central to this endeavour since the very beginning, and the influence of his work on this body of practice remains profound. His vivid depictions of the human form are for me the closest expression of the human condition realised in paint. Bacon creates a pulse that emanates through his masterly application of pigment, dust, oil and sand which I feel are the closest expression of human transiency that I have experienced, and he therefore forms a salient inspiration for my practice. It is no surprise that Bacon was adamant in his denial of being a representational painter. However, it is often suggested that he was, and he is often described as a figurative painter insomuch that he painted the human form. Bacon's primary influence on my work has been his engrossing ability to paint the invisible and make us reconsider what we think we know, and transform it into something that hijacks our human faculties. As Gilles Deleuze noted in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* his: 'Painting directly attempts to release the presences beneath representation, beyond representation. The color system itself is a system of direct action on the nervous system.' [sic.] (Deleuze, 1981: 37). In many ways this quotation reflects my intentions. However my means are in many ways different from Bacon's and offer disparate opportunities and possibilities, and it is these different techniques and ideas that my praxis explores.

Ken Currie raises awkward questions with his work and these centre around age and illness as well as social and philosophical dilemmas. His subjects, palettes and compositions inform my work. His paintings align despair with the contemporary human condition through a tableaux of works saddling historical tradition and social realism. For me he is the Renaissance man of our woeful human condition capturing the obscure, the absurd and the nauseating with great skill and subtlety. His calm, considered craft explores the uneasiness of his subjects which is quite the opposite to Bacon's painterly onslaught, however, the calmness Currie creates often amplifies the power of the artworks. Currie's work is steeped in representation but an encounter with it is often preternatural rather than temporal.

Stuart Brisley is a pivotal figure in the development of performance art, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. His bravery in the dismantling of social tradition through his work is for me both exceptional and terrifying. It is the discomfort he provokes, that I hope in some way to reflect in my practice through my performance in front of the lens. Much of his work has evolved around ideas of abjection, one of the most notable being *Arbeit Macht Frei*. In this performance Brisley's rejection of

genocide utilises representation, but certainly not in a conventional format. Indeed, his 20 minutes of vomiting contained therein disintegrates conventional notions of representation into something that has equal, if not more, affectual qualities in its commentary on the Nazi concentration camps of the second world war. Brisley's view of performance is relevant in that he saw it as having: 'a sense of identity with the audience' and a departure from his 'ordinary social self'. His consistent and large catalogue of performative acts, although embedded with representation, continuously traverse into works that trouble the soul. (Williams, 2010)

If my work aligns with any artist who utilises photography for expression it would be Antoine D'Agata. For me he deconstructs the notion of photographic perfection in the search for something much more affectual. Antoine D'Agata's photographic work is entirely uncompromising and he describes his relentless endeavour as: '... a perpetual and hopeless search for ever new experiences and encounters. And while the camera is always present, I try to give up technical and aesthetic control of it and focus on the existential considerations at hand.' (Shammaa, 2014). In many ways for me his creative practice exists outside of photography. The content of his work revolves largely around images of himself and the people he encounters. However, these are not performances or poses, they are authentic in every way. His work manages to disintegrate many of the problems associated with photography in that his lens is not detached from the action, it is part of it. Yet D'Agata's work is far from journalistic. His photographs carry with them an affectual quality in a format that is often shackled by notions of representation and they inhabit a space somewhere between ecstasy and nightmare.

Having provided a broad yet brief art historical context for my practice, I will endeavour to uncover the philosophical and practical challenges that are associated with the self-portrait and identity in line with key concepts linked to representation and affect theory.

Chapter I

The problem with identity

Initially there was no problem with identity for me. Up until now, when I looked through the camera lens, what I saw was a mirror of myself and therefore my exploration for the work was going to be creative yet pragmatic. Naturally I believed this as portrait depictions throughout art and cultural history were, for me until now, relatively unproblematic. Their purpose was to present the idealised image, the noble statesman, the leader of (wo)men, the religious icon, the successful trader, ... traversing into the pouting selfie, the revered thespian and the celebrity retouch. My aim was to undo this and deconstruct the image into an 'authentic' rendering that assimilated the condition of being alive. The intention was not to be flawless but to present oneself as being flawed.

After each photographic image I took I seemed to be getting further away, not closer, and the repetition of the action increased my isolation from what I could see in front of me. Therein the problem manifested itself, and it was one that I had not taken into consideration until now - and subsequently it has become central to this investigation. For the first time there was a realisation that my identity is separate from me. It belongs to those who encounter me, and it is they who help shape and influence it. To explore when this separation took place it is essential to consider a particular work of Jacques Lacan that was first delivered at the *16th International Congress of Psychoanalysis* in 1949 and later published as *The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience* in 1966. Lacan highlights the discontinuity of the self and one's image in a concept he describes as the 'mirror stage':

The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic—and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development. (Sheridan, 1977: 3)

Lacan proposes the 'mirror stage' to be 'the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image.' (Ibid., 2). This Oedipus-like psychological trauma takes place between the ages of six and eighteen months and marks the separation of our internal and external self. What I had initially imagined to be a completely visual praxis had now taken a psychosomatic shift. Lacan's words were now central to the creative task: '... he must resolve as I his discordance with his own reality.' (Ibid., 4). This gave focus to the dilemma - once we have seen ourselves we are outside of ourselves, and from this point forward our identity is manufactured and performed for others. This (ironically) I recognised. What we understand to be our identity is largely fictional, and created by the way we interact with others as Michel Foucault suggests: 'identity is a discourse like any other. There can be no 'real' identity, just a way of talking about the self'. (Harrison et al., 1992: np)

It is apparent then that identity is indeed a performance. Judith Butler writes extensively about gender and her thoughts on performativity in relation to identity are especially relevant to identifying the flaws in any attempt to achieve authenticity:

Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives. (Butler, 1988: 526)

This notion of performing a role in the expression of our identity has been written about extensively by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905 – 1980) in *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. Sartre describes the condition as 'bad faith' whereby we escape the overwhelming reality of existence by employing a state of mind through which we deceive ourselves into believing that our choices are limited, or by objectifying ourselves through the adoption of a role. Sartre uses the example of a waiter, and he illustrates how the knowledge of a role informs our behaviour and rescues us from the greater rigor of existing authentically:

The equal dignity of being, possessed by my being-for-others and by my being-for-myself permits a perpetually disintegrating synthesis and a perpetual game of escape from the for-itself to the for-others and from the for-others to the for-itself. (Sartre, 1943: 58)

This is central to my dilemma as however we search for it, the apposing notions of identity and authenticity make it impossible to reveal the 'true self'. The process of this creative practice has

illustrated that, independent of what we want our desired outcome to be, we still seek a perfect depiction that fits with our scheme of things or the role we adopt. What is more, this cannot be undone, we cannot depict an authentic identity.

The inescapable reality is that this authentic depiction is beyond temporal reach. The endeavour to create the 'absolute' portrayal of the natural human condition is contradictory. As the shutter falls time and time again within this practice-based research, it is apparent that my pursuit of an idealised image of imperfection is driving the work. Contradictory notions of identity and authenticity make it impossible to reveal the 'true self'.

Through the process of this creative practice the futility of this search proliferates. There is now a realisation that we cannot depict an authentic identity because we seek the authentic identity. The self informs the self in a constant cycle of adjustment and reappraisal that is inescapable. Arthur Rimbaud poetically captures the dilemma:

I is another. If the brass wakes the trumpet, it's not its fault. That's obvious to me: I witness the unfolding of my own thought: I watch it, I hear it: I make a stroke with the bow: the symphony begins in the depths, or springs with a bound onto the stage.
(Rimbaud, 1871)

We can choose to dismiss poetics if we wish, however no interrogation of the 'self' is worthwhile without consideration of the extensive writings of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 - 1900). His theories about the 'self' challenged conventional thinking at the time, and continue to do so in contemporary culture and social history. At times contradictory, much of his work tackled the issues surrounding authenticity. In *Schopenhauer as Educator: Nietzsche's Third Untimely Meditation* he describes man as a static being of 'totally exterior surface with no kernel, a tattered, daubed, puffed up bag of clothes'. This idea he posits of a superficial veneer is deceptive as in *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* he observes: 'How Seeing (Schein) Becomes Being (Sein) [sic.]' which suggests a transitory state whereby man is in constant struggle with existence rather than simply being a specious outer layer. Preceding and supporting Judith Butler's observations noted earlier, he suggests, that as we become more familiar with a role we play, the role actually starts to fuse into our true identity. The line between what we are and what we have become is blurred and fused together.

However, in *Untimely Meditations III*, Nietzsche suggests that to find the real nature of ourselves and to strive for true authenticity requires perseverance, bravery and removal of all the behavioural veneers we use to disguise ourselves:

But how can we find ourselves again? How can the human being know itself? It is a thing dark and veiled; and if the hare has seven skins, the human can slough off seventy times seven and still not be able to say, 'Now that is what you really are, that is no longer outer shell.' (Parkes, 1994: 339)

This is central to, and highlights the dilemma of, my praxis. Do we accept what we are perceived to 'be' through our learnt and manufactured representations or do we embark on the journey of removing the layers to reveal the intrinsic reality of our 'self'?

It is these contradictions that create the complications. They begin to explain the hundreds of photographic stills and hours of video footage that have been discarded during my pursuit. They are proof of the burden of identity. Even when the image appears flawed it is a result of my pursuit to fulfil my objectives for the work. It has to fill the criteria of my expectations and as a result I am always seeking and never accepting. The 'perfect' depiction of 'I' as an entity is constantly sought by what I think it is. My plan to realise the agony of existence, the temporality of flesh, the beauty in ugliness, is forever reduced to an idealised representation of it.

However, Heidegger offers some salvation. In his seminal text *Sein und Zeit (Being and Time)*, published in 1927, Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976) introduced the concept of '*Dasein*' which was in complete opposition to the Cartesian idea of the human being as a 'thing that thinks'. His notion of 'being there' elevates individual existence from not simply what the mind interprets about the world around it to be, but moreover an existence that is in a permanent state of discovery and amazement of the entities around it. This aligns closely with the opposing notions of representation and affect - the first being cerebral, the second being visceral. To me this suggested I stop thinking about what it means to exist and how to represent it, and to progress the work with a more enlightened, uncertain and open mindset of discovery. This philosophical approach to my practice provided much needed stimuli to aid my journey through mediocrity to something more profound. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2017)

To this end my final submission will be made up of three separate artworks, the first will be a triptych of images entitled *On the subject of my future* and there are two video installations; *Atrophy* and *Transfiguration*.

The photographic triptych, *On the subject of my future*, that forms part of my praxis is a visual manifestation of the living process in continual deterioration. The artwork explores and challenges the momentary notion of photography and undoes this principle through capturing imagery over time. This provides a metaphor for the living, human condition and is performed through 15” - 30” exposures. The body as a solid form is challenged with depictions of the body in a state of flux. The resultant images are intentionally fluid and fortuitous and provide expressive opportunity. Bacon discussed uncertainty in his process and it is something that also exists in this technique: ‘there is a possibility that you get through this accidental thing something much more profound than what you really wanted’ (Sylvester, 1980: 17). It is this process that emancipates the outcome. Through a performance in front of the lens, this serendipitous technique can destabilise the resultant image and attempt to create a true(r) evocation of ‘being there’.

So in order to capture these images, a performance takes place in front of the lens, and this notion of performance through the development of my praxis actually presents opportunity. If I can interrupt the dialogue of identity, it may be possible to get closer to my initial aims of exploring the human condition and escape the torment of representations of identity. But is the performative act a flawed process? The notion of authenticity and performance are at odds. However, in line with the definition offered by Dr Paul Jeff, Director of Research Degrees at Swansea College of Art, this very act may indeed free the resulting image from a representation into an evocation:

In performed photography the notion of record is blurred with the creative act, fact and fiction blur together in testimony and this allows the medium freedom from its old servitude. Instead of a concrete and objective document we have the possibility of a ‘drifting’ uncertain document tied to experience in a much more subjective manner. (Jeff, 2010)

Unlike much of Jeff’s practice, the audience do not form part of my process. However there are similarities in terms of the resultant recorded image: ‘the performative act (event) and the record are collapsed into a single utterance and are indistinguishable as separate parts of the work.’ (Ibid.)

The video installation *Atrophy* further explores this instability and takes place at the intersection between the still and moving image. This time a collection of photographic images are taken and then animated using the 5" x 7" format ratio to mimic the traditional photographic form. The dissolving transformations are witnessed in conjunction with an evocative, pulsating soundtrack that suggests the inner functions of the body. This rhythm of life is not intended to be a pleasant one, but one that suggests abject possibilities.

Transfiguration, as the name suggests, works on the opposite end of the affective spectrum and intends to offer the audience a more positive encounter. The transformation that takes place is from a literal, filmed, moving portrait, into an evocative, tonal, pulse of colour. This experience is also enhanced by a soundbed, this time of running water. However, like the visual this has also undergone a creative treatment to alienate it from the literal. These artworks will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Replacing the visual with the visceral

'Approaches to the image in its relation to language are incomplete if they operate only on a semantic or semiotic level, however the level is defined' (Massumi, 2002: 26)

This argument is flawed.
It needs asphyxiating. It
exists under predetermined
conditions that are not fit
for purpose. We discuss I and
the OTHER through linguistic
representations that have been
negotiated. That is not the aim of
this art. It will not negotiate
I will create a paradoxical
earthquake.

From the beginning, this praxis has intended to evoke affect as an attempt to disrupt representations of identity. As the artworks explore lived experience (or the experience of being alive) then the research methodology most appropriate to this study is autoethnography. Therefore, in terms of language, this chapter will attempt to operate through a reductive process in order to better understand the work. It is not that it will provide less, on the contrary, the intention is to provide more. The constraints of academic language will be periodically relinquished to allow for a qualitative, autoethnographic research approach to emerge. This is because the artwork is not simply about the world in which we live, but about the condition of being alive. It is not simply what it looks like, but what it feels like. It ceases to be a facsimile and becomes an evocation similar to the way Jean-Francois Lyotard describes the artefact: ‘the work is not merely a cultural object, although it is that too. It harbours within it an excess, a rapture, a potential of associations that overflows all the determinations of its “reception” and “production.”’ (O’ Sullivan, 2001: 126)

So how do these associations operate? The work *Atrophy* explores the transiency of the human condition and the terror of this realisation: It is to glimpse the pliable molecular structure of the ‘animal’ as I fail to recognise myself as ‘myself’ and become ‘other’. Editor of *Antennae Project*, Giovanni Aloï, describes this process with reference to Deleuze and Guattari, and Julia Kristeva:

... to become-animal is to become a body-without-organs, to cut across the strata of organism, significance and subjectification that serve to (ab)normalise us as biological, social and sexual beings. In becoming-animal the body becomes an event, the action that it itself becomes; signification enters into deviation, identity into variance; the subject becomes a deject, the abject other than object.
(Aloï, 2007: 2)

The depictions of my appearance in *Atrophy* are grotesque representations borne through the subversion of digital photography as the medium for perfection. The analogue, linear notion of human life is translated into digital binary codes and then disbanded. These codes are made unstable, pliable and visceral; this is

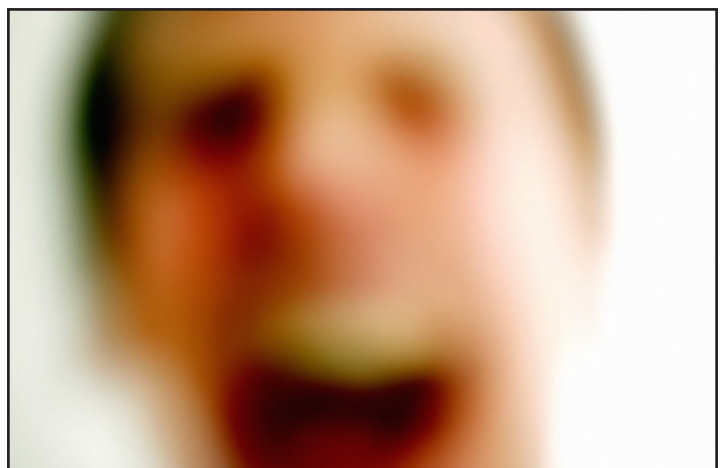
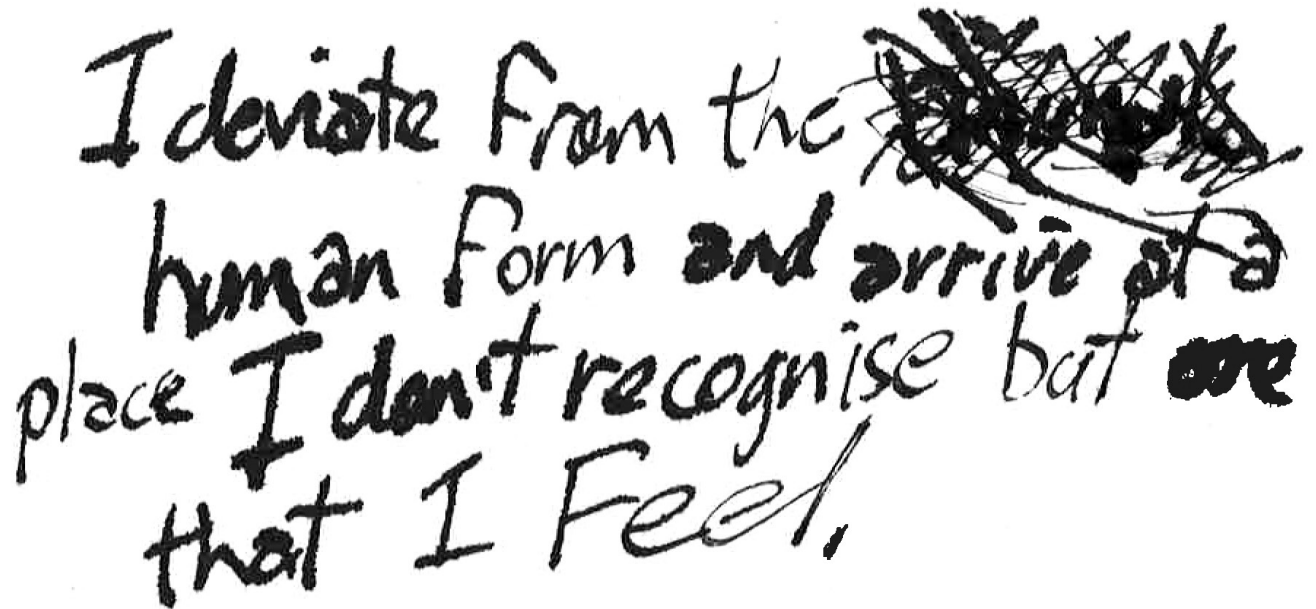


Fig 1. Martin Bush, 2017. *Atrophy* [video installation].

achieved by transforming overexposed stills into moving imagery. The resultant images are given a pulse, then suffocated, and presented metaphorically like organs floating in a laboratory jar.



I deviate from the ~~human form~~ and arrive at a place I don't recognise but ~~are~~ that I Feel.

This immersive, moving image is presented as a specimen for onlookers. Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895-1975) extensive writings on the subject of the 'grotesque' through his study of Francois Rabelais provides a useful reference when considering *Atrophy*. He says of the 'grotesque': The object transgresses its own confines, ceases to be itself. The limits between the body and the world are erased, leading to the fusion of the one with the other and with surrounding objects (Bakhtin, 1984: 310). To escape representation and seek an affective response to my self-portraiture necessitates this deformation. The familiar facial features are transformed into oily metaphors alongside an audio track of alien-like echoes and drones. The aesthetic is a perverse rendition of the portrait. It has been achieved through a largely involuntary process and the visual qualities have not been planned. It is possible, that through this methodology, that I have arrived at a 'truer' identity through forming this liquid, carnivalesque figure: 'The outward and inward features are often merged into one.' (Ibid., 318). The hollow eyes and mouth suggest the abject, the flesh burns and leaks through each transitional stage and as Bakhtin points out, it is: 'In the example of grotesque, displeasure is caused by the impossible and improbable nature of the image ...' (Ibid., 305).



Fig 2. Martin Bush, 2017. *Transfiguration* [video installation].

The *Transfiguration* video installation also attempts to extract an affective evocation from the self-portrait but in a very different way. By the abstraction and reduction of visual and audio material, an encounter has arguably been created. The portrait is reduced to a series of oscillating geometric forms of alternating colours. Each square has been produced through an algorithm that has calculated the predominant colour found in each portion of a moving image, in this instance a self-portrait. It then translates the giant pixel-like squares into the associated resultant colours. As the video plays through the balance of the values change, then the colour readjusts and changes the hue of each square. The outcome is a constantly oscillating visual paradigm. The complex relationships of colour are continually changing as each square switches to a new hue. This rhythmic, immersive, evocation is intended to be overwhelming and hypnotic. It is proposed that a transformative process will take place in the space of the artwork. The outcome is intended to be one that stimulates affect.

Thoughts turn inwards as
thinking ENDS and
feeling begins.

It is imperative that the *Transfiguration* video installation is encountered on a large scale, much in the same way Mark Rothko (1903 – 1970) desired the viewer to interact with his colour field paintings. The encounter must be immersive. The oscillating palette should be an overwhelming experience. In a joint letter (that was later broadcast) to the art editor of the *New York Times* on June 7, 1943, Rothko, along with Adolph Gottlieb wrote:

We favor the simple expression of the complex thought. We are for the large shape because it has the impact of the unequivocal. We wish to reassert the picture plane. We are for flat forms because they destroy illusion and reveal truth [sic.]. (Stix, H. 1943).



Fig 3. Mark Rothko, 1952.
Untitled (Lavender and Green)
[oil on canvas]. At: unknown.

In a similar way the viewer must be situated in my work - it should encompass and hypnotise. The portrait can then be experienced rather than deciphered – this is our truth. The accompanying soundbed has been created to heighten this sensory experience. By isolating and then immersing the senses, the intention is that a visceral transformation takes place during the encounter, one that is experienced as much as it is seen. The source for the sound is natural running water. It has been modified so the audible fluidity operates on a similar rhythmical evocation as the visual – they join together. In this installation piece the analogue liquid flow operates alongside the flicker of the digital palette. However, nothing is as it seems: ‘truth’ oscillates according to perspective and the work

Transfiguration is similar in its performance. Without immersive engagement the work returns to its representational state as physical distance from the work provides a more recognisable and literal perspective. The portrait is revealed once again and although abstracted it is still identifiable. We are prised from the intensity of the immersive experience and jolted back into literal representation. Through this video installation literal representation has been hijacked and re-appropriated into an affective encounter. This self-portrait is to be experienced rather than interpreted.

On the subject of my future is presented in triptych form as the artwork has to firstly escape the tyranny of its appearance. A photograph of the head or face is conventionally considered to be a portrait and therefore this inevitably effects its interpretation. A single image of this type will always be a representation or depiction, largely as a result of the history and tradition of the format

[illegible]

Unrecognise me and think
of me as what I am or not.
not as what I mean.

However, a triptych offers latitude during the audience encounter, bringing with it opportunity and potential. Historically it has religious and spiritual connotations which is advantageous for this work as it evokes an incorporeal interpretation. It provides the one work with multiple facets and therefore has the possibility of being many things. (At this point the examples illustrated below are indicative of the final triptych. The transient nature of the images mean they will be recorded at the latest possible point in this process and seen for the first time in the associated exhibition.)

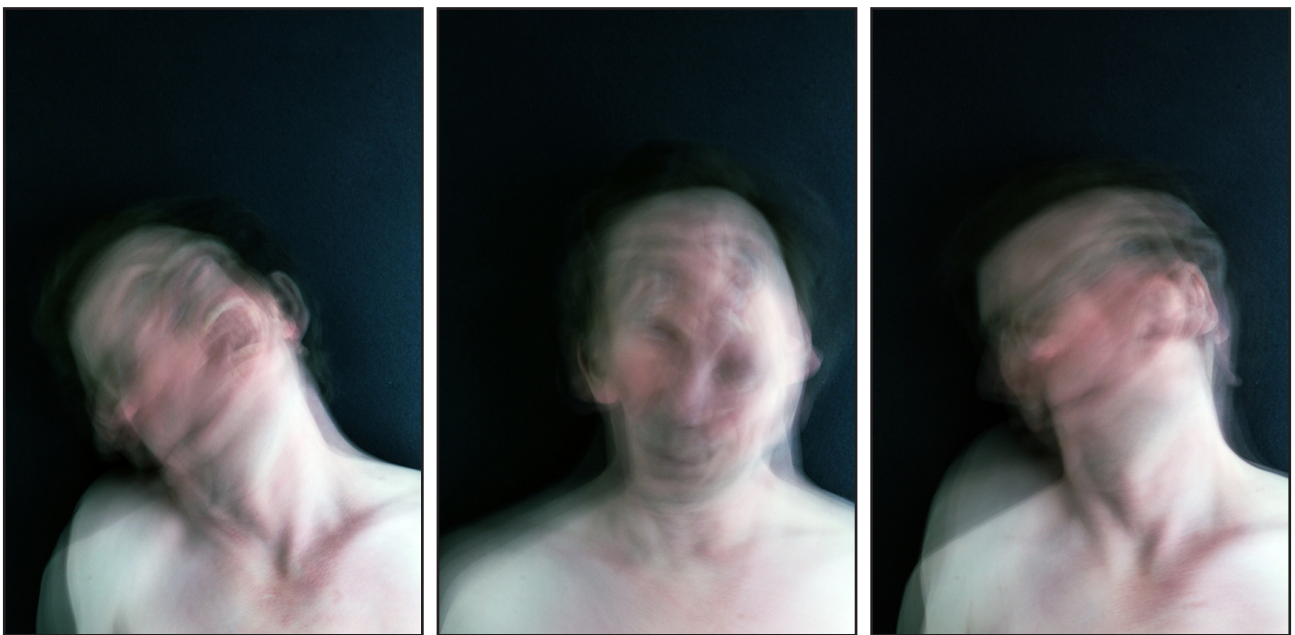


Fig 4. Martin Bush, 2017. *On the subject of my future* (preparatory work) [digital photographic triptych].

The triptych offers a complex relationship between each one of the pieces and the audience, and it is this complexity that is being sought in order to cloud the parameters of interpretation and escape the rigors of convention. The affectual qualities are multiplied through these discorded relationships and from this, there is the possibility of a more intense response due to its unfamiliarity.

The events of the grotesque sphere are always developed on the boundary dividing one body from the other and, as it were, at their points of intersection. One body offers its death, the other its birth, but they are merged in a two-bodied image.’
(Bakhtin, 1984: 322)

Although these the images are static, as mentioned previously, they are composed through time. This disbands the order of events because the moment is not captured – it is three separate periods of time that are captured. Similar to the way film director David Lynch fractures time and scrambles narratives in his work, the aim of *On the subject of my future* is to remove the certainty on which representation heavily relies. This disquietude intentionally forces the viewer into a different way of approaching the work, and this unknown approach is more likely to realise an affective response. This perversion of time also allows the opportunity to malform the portrait. Familiar facial features are stretched, torn, erased and smeared providing evocations of something faintly familiar but also anomalous.

This time-based approach is not alien to the photographic portrait. In fact, it is central to the development of the medium and the format of photographing people. Historically the pose was held over long periods of time. This was as a result of the technology at the time that was responsible for the invention of the modern photographic image. The use of the daguerreotype from 1839 onwards created an emotional quality that was embedded in the process. Walter Benjamin (1892 – 1940) identified this process as being responsible for the pensive, penetrating portraits we see from this period in his essay *A Short History of Photography* in 1934:

Fig 5. Robert Adamson and David Octavius Hill, 1843 - 1846.
Mrs Elizabeth (Johnstone) Hall, Newhaven fishwife [calotype print].
At: National Galleries of Scotland.



The procedure itself taught the models to live inside rather than outside the moment. During the long duration of these shots they grew as it were into the picture and in this way presented an extreme opposite to the figures on a snapshot.
(Trachtenberg (ed.), 1980: 199-217)

The technique I have adopted to create *On the subject of my future* follows the same procedure however my approach is not static. The time-based process used, seeks a similar growth away from representation. The extended exposures help the mask slip with the intention of revealing more clearly what is in front of the lens as opposed to what it colludes to portray. Joanna Lowry explains in her essay *Portraits, still video portraits and the account of the soul*:

... focussed upon the notion of the pose; upon the way in which, when we are photographed, we become complicit in the discourse of photographic representation, gathering our selfhood together, performing our identity, presenting ourselves to the camera, holding ourselves steady in a mock tableau that mimics the stasis of the photograph itself. It is in the pose that we both disguise ourselves and give ourselves away, and the eloquence of the photograph is in its double-edged revelation of precisely this ambiguity. (Green et al., 2006: 65-78)

with regards to a collaboration
between me and the glass —
there will no longer
be any.

The relationship this triptych has developed between the still image and movement is significant. In Chapter 2 of *The Bleed: Where Body Meets Image of Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Brian Massumi discusses at length the perception of how we see our self and its limitations in contrast to how we are perceived by others. The terms he uses are 'mirror-vision and movement-vision.' These terms in many ways identify my intention for the imagery I create through my process:

Mirror-vision and movement-vision are discontinuous; between them there is no mediation. The first is relative (ongoing reciprocal determination of I-me/I-You), the second is absolute (self-distancing). (Massumi, 2002: 50)

The conventional still portrait only reveals a part of the self through the mirror of the lens whereas the compositions I create through movement seek to reveal more. In my plight of discovery it is valid to remove my subjective relationship with the image of myself and seek a manifestation that even I do not recognise, or at least have no control over. For myself and the viewer (and indeed myself as viewer): 'The eye is out of its socket, hovering on an exorbital axis of vision, seeing elsewhere as a kind of other without other, ...' (Ibid., 51). The transitory nature of the portraits is an essential part of breaking down the relationship with my perceived identity:

The continuity of movement-vision is an included disjunction. It is a continuous displacement of the subject, the object, and their general relation: the empirical perspective uniting them in an act of recognition. It is an opening onto a space of transformation in which a de-objectified movement fuses with a de-subjectified observer. (Ibid., 51)

Massumi emphatically concludes the chapter: 'DISSEVER THE IMAGELESS FROM THE IDEAL [sic]' (Ibid., 67). This is my *mise en scène*.

To exhibit the work the images are to be presented in formal frames. This suggests a finality, as if to say a conclusion has been drawn and the work is complete, but it has not. This framing convention is used to achieve a paradox as I now appreciate that they will never be complete. The cycle of looking at the mirror, releasing the shutter, inducing a response, and then making a selection is largely arbitrary. The frames merely freeze a moment in time and can only be interpreted as a pause in the proceedings whereby the findings are reported through the conventions of an art gallery. They highlight the contradiction of identity by providing temporary closure for the viewer of something that is actually still in a state of constant flux.

By stopping here I give
you a masquerade. The pause
means there is a deception taking
place.

The three major pieces of work, *Atrophy*, *On the subject of my future* and *Transfiguration*, that are the culmination of this praxis propose not to solve, but uncover the conundrum of identity. It is only through their creation, alongside my intention to evoke an affective rather than representative response, that I have been challenged and inspired to re-evaluate and progress my cognitive and creative abilities. What has been created hopefully subverts some of the traditional notions of what the self-portrait is, and offers a more fluid interaction with the format that evokes contemplation of what it is to be alive.

Eighteen months ago I discovered the rotten carcass of a sheep on a Welsh beach.

The innards were outwards,
the eye sockets empty.
the ribs were bare and
the stench was rotten.

This wasn't actually a negative experience. In fact, it was a celebration that at some point this animal had been alive and this work attempts to do the same albeit in a perverse way. It attempts to locate a new form of beauty that is not imposed by tradition or construct, but is a natural by-product of an encounter with art.

Conclusion

There is no conclusion.

In the completion of this body of praxis there is recognition that the resultant artwork is in fact a pause in the journey. Its ontological subject matter means it can at best serve as an unfixed diagnosis of the human condition at the time of writing this thesis and at the time of the creation of these artworks. Mortality means it can only be momentary:

The body that figures in all the expressions of the unofficial speech of the people is the body that fecundates and is fecundated, that gives birth and is born, devours and is devoured, drinks, defecates, is sick and dying. (Bakhtin, 1984: 319)

The combination of these factors means there are no results to uncover and there is no conclusion to be drawn, therefore a reflection is more fit for purpose.

our existence is measured over time,
we deteriorate over time.
we are troubled by the
passing of time.
We are transitory objects passing
through a molecular universe of
uncertainty.
we are time.

In terms of a philosophical context this praxis rejects a singular reading of the self and therefore is indicative of many post-structuralist concepts. The subject matter has ensured the overall approach in terms of my practice and critique has been multi-faceted. Through the consideration of some of the key concepts of Lacan, Nietzsche, Sartre, Deleuze and Guattari, Kristeva and Heidegger, an

attempt has been made to understand and locate the work in an artistic and philosophical context. Without the enlightenment that their writings have provided there was a danger that I may not have lifted up the allegorical stone. Although still perplexed by the complexity of my subject matter, and disorientated in my journey, I embrace the chaos wholeheartedly because as ever, the process is vital, the outcome is negligible.

Glossary of key terms

An explanation of intended definitions is provided for the key terms used throughout this essay. For the purpose of consistency these terms are interpreted from a post-structuralist position.

Abject - Derived from the Latin word *abicere* meaning cast off or rejected, the term is discussed in detail in the *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, in which Julia Kristeva refers to it as the human reaction to a potential crisis in distinguishing between the 'self' and 'other' and this is often caused by recognition of our own materiality. It distinguishes between the inner and outer through expulsion of bodily substances beginning with the mother giving birth to the child, through to actions of vomiting, bleeding, defecation etc. (Dino, 2018)

Affect - In literary theory affect works in opposition to representation and is the spontaneous, internal and personal transformation that can take place when we encounter a piece of art. Outside of socially constructed feelings or emotional responses, it describes the visceral, nonrational evocation that is stirred. With its origin in psychology it has been written about extensively by Brian Massumi in *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. (Massumi, 2000)

Animal - A key concept discussed in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. The notion of becoming animal is the movement away from corporeal stability and unity, into a state of disarticulation and disfigurement. It is not a literal metamorphosis but a condition of freedom through non-identity. (Research Gate: 2018)

Carnavalesque - Sequestered for use in cultural studies through the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin (1895 - 1975), in *Rabelais and His World*, carnivalesque disrupts arbitrary cultural distinctions of power and order through the use of humour, satire and the grotesque.

Cartesien - A philosophical approach based on logical and mechanical interpretation, as developed by René Descartes (1596 – 1650) which placed little reliance on sensation or perception.

Dasein - A German word literally translated to mean 'to be present'. It was a key term used by Martin Heidegger (1889 - 1976) in *Being and Time* (1927) and as such the English translation of the work adopted the German phrase into English vocabulary. In philosophy it relates to an awareness of one's mode of being. (Macey, 2000: 82)

Encounter - In the first pages of his book *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*, and quoting from their book *Difference and Repetition*, Simon O'Sullivan defines the encounter as working outside of representation and as 'something in the world [that] forces us to think' (O'Sullivan, 2006:1). This view rejects material interpretations of the artwork based on social constructions and replaces it with an experience gained through the disruptive force of the event.

Grotesque - In the 1600s this term first appeared in French literature and was attached to negative physical descriptions of the body or body parts. Present use of the term often combines the

comic with the horrific. A critical figure to shape the meaning of the term was Mikhail Bakhtin: 'Exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style.' (Bakhtin, 1984: 303)

Identity - The term identity can be interpreted both sociologically or philosophically. Sociologically it tends to refer to the idea of self-image and how we think about the self as being different to others. Philosophically it deals with questions of continuity and existence and the changes that a person can undergo and still retain their own distinct essence.

Ontology - Philosophically, ontology is the study of what is real or what exists. Literally translated from the Greek as the 'science of being real' it is a branch of metaphysics that deals with how we group, define, relate and divide things according to their similarities and differences in order to increase our understanding of the world.

Other - Largely established through the writing of Jacques Lacan (1901 – 1981) and Emmanuel Lévinas (1906–1995) the other is a complex term used to distinguish the way people view those different and separate from themselves, from a position of power and one that objectifies their being. It also recognises the individual being as a different entity and operating in opposition to the socially constructed identity of the self.

Representation - Linked to semiotics, representation deals with the shared meaning of images or objects. It is within the essential structure of these, where meaning is often derived. It operates through the presentation of recognisable motifs to an audience with an agreed, socially constructed understanding of them.

Self - There are many interpretations proffered for the 'self' by numerous philosophers from Descartes to Kant. In this essay the desired interpretation is the recognition of our personal identity as who we think we are, especially through the conditioning of gender, race, class, and status.

Truth - There is widespread doubt in philosophy as to whether an universal explanation can be provided for this term which means 'truth' is at the very least a problematic concept to explain. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* succinctly highlights this dichotomy as: '... what truths are, and what (if anything) makes them true.' Therefore, the neo-classical correspondence theory definition of: '... a belief is true if there exists an appropriate entity - a fact - to which it corresponds ...' provides a partial, yet acceptable interpretation for this essay. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2018)

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N.B. This section has been created in order for Turnitin to analyse the content that has been submitted in this essay in a handwritten format:

(p11)

This argument is flawed. It needs asphyxiating. It exists under predetermined conditions that are not fit for purpose. We discuss I and the other through linguistic representations that have been negotiated. That is not the aim of this art. It does not wish to negotiate.

I will create a paradoxical earthquake.

(p13)

I deviate from the human/animal form and arrive at a place I don't recognise, but one that I feel.

(p14)

Thoughts turn inwards as thinking ends and feeling begins.

(p16)

I want you to stop seeing me as me as me as me as me as me as me as me as me as me as me as me as
me as me as me as me as me as me as me as me as me as me as me as me as me as me as me as me as
me as me as me as me as me as me as me as me as me as me as me.

(p17)

Unrecognise me and think of me as what I am or not, not as what I mean.

(p19)

With regards to a collaboration between me and the glass ... there will no longer be any.

(p20)

By stopping here I give you a masquerade. The pause means there is a deception taking place.

(p21)

The innards were outwards, the eye sockets empty, the ribs were bare and the stench was rotten.

(p22)

There is no conclusion.

(p23)

Our existence is measured over time, we deteriorate over time, we are troubled by the passing of time. We are transitory objects passing through a molecular universe of uncertainty. We are time.