

In Light of the Past

Since the invention, development and subsequent widespread use of the daguerreotype in the mid 19th Century, we have used photography as a means of remembrance and to record our lives. Once the privilege of only those that could afford to commission a portrait painter, the personal portrait became accessible and affordable to the masses, and the photograph rapidly became the means by which we attempt to honour and immortalise our loved ones and ourselves. From the unique objects of representation that were daguerreotypes, via the multiplicity of the ‘carte-de-visite’ and ‘cabinet card’, through to the introduction of the *Kodak Brownie* and the family snapshot, and onwards to mobile phone cameras and *Facebook*, it seems the photograph has been cherished as an accepted ‘aide-de-memoire’ from the start. But how good is photography as a means of remembrance? As previously implied to, the mutual association of memory and photography has long existed. As early as 1859, the American writer Oliver Wendall Holmes described the daguerreotype as “the mirror with a memory”.¹ However, memory is a complex configuration and as Batchen suggests, “there are many types of memory and many ways to remember”.²

Within the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, psychologist John Sutton³ defines the word ‘memory’ as a label for “a diverse set of cognitive capacities by which we retain information and reconstruct past experiences, usually for present purposes”.⁴ He goes on to say that: “Most notably, the human ability to conjure up long-gone but specific episodes of our lives is both familiar and puzzling, and is a key aspect of personal identity.”⁵ Memory *is* puzzling, particularly because it is a reconstruction of past events in which the reconstructed events have similarities with, but differ from, those original events.

We remember experiences and events that are not happening now, so memory differs from perception.⁶ We remember events which really happened, so memory is unlike pure imagination. Yet, in practice, there can be close interactions between remembering, perceiving, and imagining. Remembering is often suffused with emotion, and is closely involved in both extended affective states such as love and grief, and socially significant practices such as promising and commemorating.⁷

It is through memory that we experience the pain or the happiness of past events, often without being consciously aware of how this occurs.

It is essential for much reasoning and decision-making, both individual and collective. It is connected in obscure ways with dreaming. Some memories are shaped by language, others by imagery. Much of our moral and social life depends on the peculiar ways in which we are embedded in time. Memory goes wrong in mundane and minor, or in dramatic and disastrous ways.⁸

Sutton goes on to claim that memory is a fundamental part of what makes us human and that without it we would be unable to live the complex lives we lead today. He states that an understanding of memory “has often been curiously neglected by philosophers”, even though it is “important in making sense of the continuity of the self, of the relation between mind and body, and of our experience of time”.⁹

One of the first thinkers to proclaim the importance of paying attention to different types of memory (such as episodic, semantic, procedural) was Henri Bergson.¹⁰ It is through Bergson’s conception of the ‘virtual image’ and the process of memory that he calls ‘contraction’, that we can perhaps begin to explore one aspect of photography’s mnemonic power. Bergson was convinced that memory should not be considered a diluted or weakened form of perception, but that a clear division needed to be made between the two. This idea of memory contradicted the then established consensus, which regarded it as a faculty of repetition or reproduction. To Bergson this was a limited concept in which the past is simply repeated or reproduced in the present, where memory is opposed to invention and creation. He

suggested that we think of time in terms of duration (*durée*): “the preservation or prolongation of the past and entailing the co-existence of past and present”.¹¹ Gilles Deleuze, in his book *Bergsonism* (1966), describes duration as “a *becoming* that endures”¹² and in his work *Photography, Cinema, Memory: The Crystal Image of Time* (2009), Damian Sutton has suggested that this mirrors our experiences of the photographic image:

Our own position within duration relies on us making sense of experiences of the present, our memories of the past, and our awareness of the oncoming future. This situation is full of tumult and paradox, and perhaps this is why *the photograph* – with its own paradoxes – always seems to reflect it.¹³

Bergson insists that “there is no perception which is not full of memories”,¹⁴ and that at every second of our lives we are presented with two facets, the actual and the virtual:

Our actual existence, then, whilst it is unrolled in time, duplicates itself all along with a virtual existence, a mirror-image. Every moment of our life presents two aspects, it is actual and virtual, perception on the one side and memory on the other. Each moment is split up as and when it is posited. Or rather, it consists in this very splitting, for the present moment, always going forward, fleeting limit between the immediate past which is now no more and the immediate future which is not yet, would be a mere abstraction were it not the moving mirror which continually reflects perception as a memory.¹⁵

This is Bergson’s explanation for the phenomena of paramnesia or of *déjà-vu*. Because the past, rather than merely preceding the present, effectively coexists with it, a recollection of the present can sometimes occur simultaneously with the present itself. The sensation is caused by believing we are undergoing an experience that we have already lived through, when in fact what is happening is a perception of the duplication we do not normally perceive, that of time into the two aspects, the actual and the virtual. This is the important Bergsonian concept of *contraction*, which attests that there is a memory of the present in the actual moment itself. Sutton aligns the basis of this concept with photography, suggesting that “the photograph contracts all pertinent images of time: there is the present of the photographic

image, the past it represents, and the future of that past, which becomes the present of the image”.¹⁶ He goes on to emphasise the connection: “this contraction occurs with all photographs... the paradoxes of movement and time that they are.”¹⁷ The photograph’s paradox of movement and time is a crucial aspect addressed in my practical research, and is discussed in relation to the idea of the ‘mise-en-abîme’, in this chapter, below.

Photography’s relationship to memory was famously discussed by Siegfried Kracauer in his 1927 essay, entitled simply, ‘Photography’, where he argues that photography describes time and space too coherently and captures too much irrelevant information to function as memory:

Memories are retained because of their significance for that person. Thus they are organized according to a principle that is essentially different from the organising principle of photography. Photography grasps what is given as a spatial (or temporal) continuum; memory-images retain what is given only insofar as it has significance. Since what is significant is not reducible to either merely spatial or merely temporal terms, memory-images are at odds with photographic representation.¹⁸

Eduardo Cadava claims that Bergson himself saw perception and photography as equivalent, in that perception works much like a camera, producing “a kind of photographic view of things, taken from a fixed point”.¹⁹ However, rather than posit this on the assumption that a camera captures reality, Bergson’s conjecture is on the basis that, working like a camera, it *fails* to capture reality. As Cadava says, “neither photography nor perception can give us what is before the camera or the eye”.²⁰ Bergson employs the metaphor of reflection in order to emphasise the virtual nature of perception:

When a ray of light passes from one medium into another, it usually traverses it with a change of direction. But the respective densities of the two media may be such that, for a given angle of incidence, refraction is no longer possible. Then we have total reflection. The luminous point gives rise to a *virtual* image which symbolizes, so to speak, the fact that the luminous rays cannot pursue their way. Perception is just a phenomenon of the

same kind... Perception therefore resembles those phenomena of reflexion which result from an impeded refraction; it is like an effect of mirage.²¹

Like photography, perception can only occur as a result of the interruption of light, at the point where “the luminous rays cannot pursue their way”. By tracing the impeded refraction (and reflection) of light that is essential to the creation of an image, perception remains, for Bergson, in the realm of the virtual, “like an effect of mirage”. The images of perception are like instantaneous snapshots, bearing traces of the past, but never able to correspond to the punctuality of the moment.

However brief we suppose any perception to be, it always occupies a certain duration, and involves consequently an effort of memory which prolongs one into another a plurality of moments...in fact, there is for us nothing that is instantaneous. In all that goes by that name there is already some work of our memory.²²

That all perception “occupies a certain duration”, so there is nothing that is instantaneous, re-emphasises the thorough entanglement of perception and memory. Bergson goes on: “every *attentive* perception truly involves a *reflexion*”,²³ so that memories are simultaneous with the perception “of which they are but the echo”.²⁴ In a passage similar to Walter Benjamin’s description of an ‘optical unconscious’²⁵ and reminiscent of the work of Marcel Proust, Bergson explains that “any memory-image that is capable of interpreting our actual perception inserts itself so thoroughly into it that we are no longer able to discern what is perception and what is memory”.²⁶

As Deleuze highlights in *Bergsonism*, the “question ‘Where are recollections preserved?’ involves a false problem... [by supposing] a badly analysed composite”.²⁷ Why suppose that memories have to be preserved somewhere? Bergson insists that there are different ‘lines of fact’ and that the brain is situated on the line of ‘objectivity’, the line on which photography

surely resides, whereas recollection is part of the line of 'subjectivity'. Deleuze also points out that it is "absurd to mix the two lines by conceiving of the brain as the reservoir or the substratum of recollections".²⁸ The Bergson scholar Keith Ansell-Pearson reinforces this idea when he reminds us that Bergson saw memory as primarily *affective*, "and as soon as we attempt to isolate the affects of memory, setting out time in space and confusing the different lines of fact, they become lifeless".²⁹

Jay Prosser has said "...photographs are not signs of presence but evidence of absence."³⁰ My enquiry into personal memories and their relationship to photography was initiated when my father was first diagnosed with cancer. By that time I had been living some distance from the family home and had seen my parents only a few times per year for the previous decade. So, in a conscious attempt to reconnect with my parents and my father particularly, I decided to review the family's collection of photographs and cine-films during my now more frequent visits. Until the time that my siblings and I had all moved away from home, these photographic albums and films had been viewed quite regularly, on special family occasions throughout our years growing up. Almost all of the photographs and films are recorded by my father, and therefore his image very rarely appears. There are many depictions of his family or friends, recorded on occasions such as holidays, births and marriages, in order to be employed as *aides-de-memoire* on future family occasions. The photographs are placed in thirteen dedicated, annotated albums and cover a period of approximately forty years. The earliest photographs are monochrome, printed from various camera formats during the late 1950s and early 1960s; there are also some *Polaroid* instant images from the 1970s, but the majority of the photographs are commercially produced colour prints from 35mm negatives. The regularity of album creation is variable, reflecting courtship and marriage, followed by

sporadic bursts of parental pride in the 1960s and 1970s, then a steadying of production throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The extent of the editing that has taken place during the creation of the albums cannot be easily ascertained, although they are all systematically ordered and annotated in my mother's hand. It appears that, common to many photographic family archives, initial analogue recording was predominantly a patriarchal procedure, but the subsequent selection, sequencing and display of images in the albums and within the home (on the walls, fireplace or bedside table), was a matriarchal practice. This reveals an interesting and overlooked perspective relating to modernist domestic recording. Although my father very much considered himself in control of the picture-making process, he was seldom in control of their subsequent viewing. As husband and father he presumably felt duty-bound to capture these important family moments, but, once the simple work of recording had been done and the films dropped off to be processed, it was then my mother who took charge. It was she who decided what we see or do not see, which images will become part of our family history, and which moments are better off forgotten. Looking at the photograph albums, I soon recognised that, although they would remain forever intriguing to me, these pages were far more a reflection of my mother's view of our family life than my father's, and therefore far less satisfactory in my Barthesian search for him or for his particular perspective. Research has revealed that the whereabouts of the negatives, in addition to those prints not selected for display, is unknown, presumed lost.

Another revelation caused by reviewing these photographs for the first time in many years, was how familiar some of them were to me. Rather than reigniting old, untapped memories, many of the images seemed deeply imbedded within my memory. A fascinating aspect was the realisation that a number of the images, particularly those that I appear in, actually *are* my

memories. This subject of the photograph being both implicated in memory, and antithetic to it, has been discussed previously in this exegesis. Most notably, Benjamin, Barthes and Sontag all begin their analyses by relating photography directly to memory and aligning the photograph with remembrance, before going on to contradictorily conclude that, in fact, the photograph is in the service of forgetting. Once again, I quote these lines from *Camera Lucida*: “Not only is the photograph never, in essence, a memory ... but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory”.³¹ An example from the family archive is the photograph below, (Fig. 1). I am convinced that I remember this moment, however, my recollection is always of the image from the camera’s perspective, from the outside looking in, rather than from the inside looking out as it should be, past my younger brother in his cowboy suit.



FIGURE 1. Album photograph (c.1977)

This is the paradox: the photographs that we take in order to remember, that we turn to in order to re-live the memory of an event, unlike the actual memory-images of that event, these photographic images imprint themselves again and again without relinquishing any of their vividness, so that eventually they eclipse the original memory all together.

Having accepted some of the mnemonic failings of the photograph album, I was drawn to another recorded family archive, which exists in materially opposite form. In addition to the photographic albums, I was also entrusted with an old, rectangular, leather case containing some forty-three canisters of cine film. Unlike the durable photographs so overtly displayed in the albums, the images captured upon these strips of film are, although positive transparencies, barely visible to the naked eye. The majority of the films are *Kodak Super 8* rolls, recorded between 1965 and 1985. There are also a number of *Kodak Standard 8* films dating from the mid-1950s until 1965, several of which have been edited, spliced together and reloaded onto larger spools. With the exception of these longer films which were shot, edited and captioned by my Grandfather, all the spools are regular 50ft process-paid amateur stock. By the mid 1960s this was the most popular and convenient method of cine recording. The *Super 8* cartridge could be loaded into the camera within seconds, and once shot, sent to the Kodak lab via a pre-paid envelope, whence it was processed and returned within a matter of days. Although amateur enthusiasts continued to cut and splice footage in order to create more coherent or inventive films, the inevitable tendency was to attempt to edit ‘in camera’ whilst recording, then send the film away for processing and just accept the results. This is true of almost all of my father’s films. Unlike the still camera, which would occasionally be operated by another member of the group, or handed to a helpful passer-by for the purposes of capturing the whole family together, my father’s cine camera was operated only ever by him.

Likewise, of the thousands of still photographic exposures that my father did make, only those that my mother subsequently selected have been imprinted into my 'memory-bank' through the family album, whereas the three-minute films that he recorded represent, absolutely exclusively, my father's personal choices.

These films, I recognise, present a particular insight into my father's preferences and perspective, as, during their making, every short sequence had almost certainly been preceded by a moment of consideration on his part, and a decision made as to whether the occasion could be deemed worthy of recording for posterity. However, the sense of re-experiencing my own memories whilst viewing the projected cine films again after many years was even more profound than researching the photographic albums had been. It seems that the vivid, vital, lifelike quality that the moving image presents, renders it an even more powerful counter-memory.

The first experimental work I produced based on my father's cine-films was a piece addressing fatherhood and potential loss, entitled *The Hard Cell*. The work was started soon after he was first diagnosed and I had recently become a father myself for the first time. On visits to see my parents, I would set up his projector in order to re-photograph particular filmic moments that I recognised as being significant personal memories, whilst they were projected onto an enlarged photograph of my father when he was young man at a similar age to myself, (Fig. 2). My father was a salesman for most of his working life, predominantly working for companies that manufacture large earth-moving equipment for use in open-cast mining. This accounts for the fact that many of the films are recorded in Central and West

Africa, in or near the region known as the copper belt, where I was born and spent my early childhood.



FIGURE 2. My father (c.1965)

In an ironic twist of the term *freeze-frame*, due to the concentrated heat produced by the projecting lamp, it is impossible to stop a cine-projector on a particular frame without melting the film and destroying the image forever. Hence, the extended exposure times necessary to record in subdued light, inevitably produce *blur* in the re-photographed image, (see Fig. 3).



FIGURE 3. Hamish Gane, *Hard Cell # 3*, (1999)

The lack of stasis within the (still) image reveals a potential space of exploration between perception and recollection and between the cinematic and the photographic. This work was exhibited as part of a site-specific installation in the living room of a recently vacated terraced house. Within this space, the work included a grid of twelve large-scale photographic prints along with the original film projections, popular music from the 1960s and contemporary portraits of my father whilst he was undergoing chemotherapy. Although the focus of my photographic practice shifted soon after this series, the potential conceptual space for exploration (between perception and recollection) that these works suggested, remained relevant and of interest to me.



FIGURE 4. Hamish Gane, *Hard Cell # 8*, (1999)

After fighting cancer for several years, my father died, and when he did, his photographic equipment was passed to me. All of the cine films had long since been transferred to VHS by my mother, so along with his cameras, projector and screen, I was given the small leather suitcase that my father had inherited from his father and in which all of their cine-films were stored.



FIGURE 5. Hamish Gane, *Cine Case*, (2007)

The case then remained on the shelf in my studio for some time before, as part of the bereavement process for my father, I decided to explore his films once more. At the time, I was co-ordinating a community outreach programme for an arts centre and gallery. One aspect of this project was running a workshop for asylum seekers, helping them to create a document of their lives in Swansea.



FIGURE 6. Hamish Gane, *Harbour Art*, (2006)

Along with the images that they were encouraged to produce with the disposable cameras they were given, I worked with them to produce images from pin-hole cameras that we built from shoe-boxes. Some of the images that they produced (for example Fig. 6), were quite evocative and beautiful. One evening during this project, I returned to my studio and noticed that much like the *Clarkes* shoe-boxes that I had been collecting for the workshops, my father's leather cine-film case was the perfect size and shape to hold the 10 x 8 inch black and white photographic paper that we were using to produce paper negatives. The notion began to emerge that it would potentially be poetic and poignant for this case, which had been a container of so many family memories or counter-memories, to somehow become the genesis of new images. However, the case is a significant family heirloom, therefore it took some deliberation before I decided to punch a hole in the leather front panel. By covering the hole with a small metal plate with a pin hole in the centre, the leather case was transformed into a camera, and I began experimenting, creating images in and around the family home. I instinctively began thinking of possible ways to incorporate my father's films into the work. In the knowledge that pinhole camera exposure times are inevitably quite extensive, it was apparent that there was no way in which any direct trace of the films' imagery would be recorded in the photographs. However, I was automatically reminded of the exceptional *Theatres* work of Japanese artist Hiroshi Sugimoto.³²

For this body of work, Sugimoto gained access to cinemas across America and exposed his 10x8 large format camera for the entire duration of a particular film, so that what remains is a single photograph depicting the theatre auditorium and a pure white screen that typically represents approximately two hours of cinema.



FIGURE 7. Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Movie Theatre - Akron Civic, Ohio*, (1980)

This simple yet brilliant act of contraction transforms thousands of images and snatches of time into the one single moment of the image. In his essay ‘Marking Time: Photography, Film and Temporalities of the Image’, David Green points out that “the *Theatres* series runs counter to prevailing conceptions of photography’s relationship to instantaneity”, and that these images are “the embodiment of temporal duration”.³³

Following Sugimoto’s example, I decided that I would work in a similar way, by exposing new images into the ‘symbolic site of memory’ that is my father’s case, for the entire duration of the projection of my father’s films. A 50ft reel of *Kodak Super 8* contains three thousand, six hundred frames. Therefore the temporal duration, if projected at the standard speed of eighteen frames per second, is three minutes and twenty seconds, or two hundred seconds. In an attempt to have some level of control over the length of the exposure, I created a selection of five pinholes, as apertures of varying sizes.

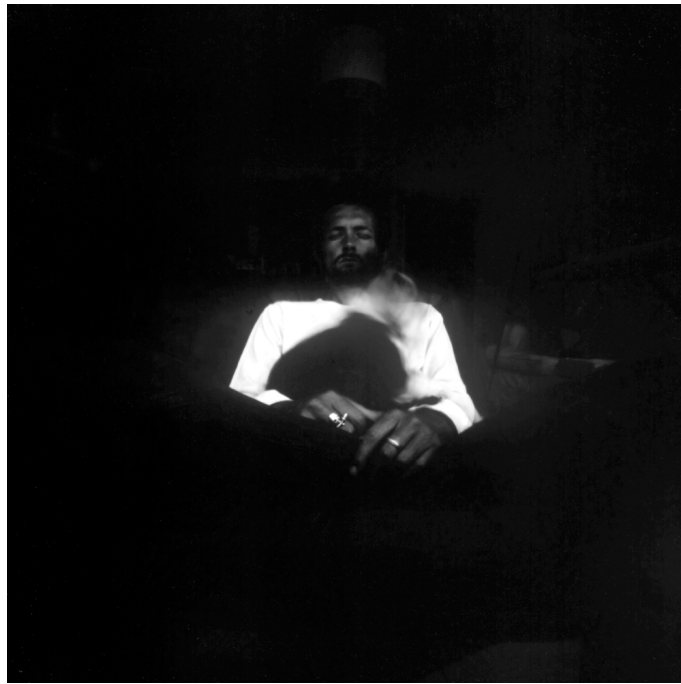


FIGURE 8. Hamish Gane, *200 Seconds* (London, Christmas 1977), (2007)

As Green seems to suggest within his aforementioned text, the majority of writing on photography has been impeded by an over-emphasis on *the instant*, with the still photograph's significance so often correlated with its ability to freeze a fleeting moment forever. In his famous essay on this subject, Thierry de Duve aligns the timing of this 'fascination with the instant' to the success of Eadward Muyerbridge's locomotion studies of the 1870s,³⁴ which for many, rendered the daguerreotype and its drawn-out exposure process, as tired and unnecessary. In describing the paradoxical nature of photography, de Duve divided photographs into the categories (or *series*); 'snapshot' (the instantaneous image such as Muybridge's animal locomotion images), and 'time exposure' (such as Julia Margaret Cameron's portraits).³⁵ The time exposure he aligns with 'nature', "only in the time exposure may photography appear with the continuity of nature",³⁶ and the snapshot he associates with cultural intervention or, as he puts it, an "abrupt artifact".³⁷ This positive association of the time exposure with nature is a perspective echoed by Walter Benjamin in his essay *A short*

history of photography.³⁸ As Mary Ann Doanne reminds us, in response to photography's technical advance, Benjamin thought that:

...there was something obscene about the instantaneous... hence his nostalgia for the daguerreotype with its relentless duration...The daguerreotype was a lost object for modernity, always already historical and of another age; it not only *took time* but it endured in the midst of an era already committed to the ephemeral. Its value was a function of the slowness of its exposure, its status as a kind of work.³⁹



FIGURE 9. Hamish Gane, *200 Seconds (Benjamin's Christening, 1979)*, (2008)

These words contain a palpable sense of the melancholy at the heart of this study, as Doanne's metonymic example touches on both the psychological and historical, describing the daguerreotype as the "lost object for modernity".⁴⁰ She goes on to note that for Benjamin there was something pre-modern about the actual length of time required for a portrait sitting, as he says himself: "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”.⁴¹ The ‘growing’ (as it were) into an image, is directly related to Benjamin’s first notion of ‘aura’ (as previously discussed in the thesis), and his recognition that the subjects of early portraits had “an aura about them”.⁴²



FIGURE 10. Hamish Gane, *200 Seconds (Polly's Cottage, New Year 1982)*, (2008)

In a recent essay, Sandra Plummer has aligned the ‘time exposure’ with Deleuze’s concept of the ‘Time-image’, developed within his study of cinema.⁴³ Initially, she suggests that the period of waiting imposed on the human subject during extended exposure photographs recalls Bergson’s famous account of waiting for a sugar cube to dissolve in water:

I want to mix a glass of sugar and water, I must, willy nilly, wait until the sugar melts. This little fact is big with meaning. For here the time I have to wait is not that mathematical time which would apply equally well to the entire history of the material world, even if that history were spread out instantaneously in space. It coincides with my impatience, that is to say, with a certain portion of my own duration, which I cannot protract or contract as I like. It is no longer something thought, it is something lived.⁴⁴

Plummer emphasises that, as Bergson points out, duration (or *durée*): is “not simply consciousness, but entails lived experience”.⁴⁵ As I have posited in previous passages related to memory, Bergson’s concept of duration does not suggest a direct continuity of time, but rather a constellation (or mosaic) of concurrent times. Plummer reminds us that “we carry our past with us, and through memory we continuously bring the past into the future”.⁴⁶ She goes on to claim that the “operation of the long exposure photograph mirrors the Bergsonian account of time. The long exposure captures an extended duration of successive states and presents these as indivisible”,⁴⁷ (see Fig. 11).

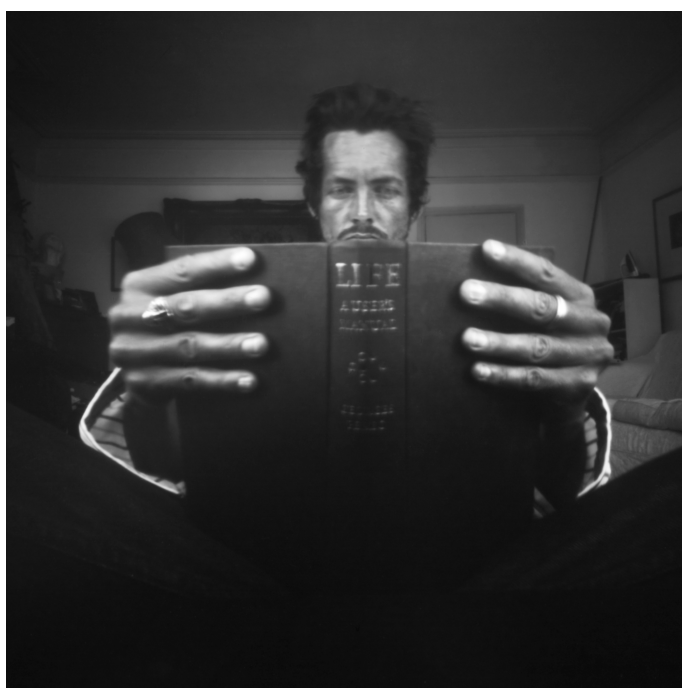


FIGURE 11. Hamish Gane, *200 Seconds (France, Summer 1979)*, (2008)

In her essay Plummer acknowledges that Deleuze's concepts of the time-image and duration are associated solely with cinema, rather than photography, but nonetheless offers an analysis based on his writing, related to the durational capacity of the photograph. She states: “It is in photography – particularly the long exposure – that we find the clearest expression of an

image of time”.⁴⁸ The extended exposure photograph is equivalent to “cinema's *recording* of a duration of time... [although unable to] ...re-present the integrity of its duration” as an immobile, solitary image, it can however represent the outcome of “movement as it unfolded before the camera”.⁴⁹ As the shutter is left open continuously, Plummer claims that the extended exposure has a continuity similar to that which is central to cinema, and exists in a space between cinema and photography: “rather than being already mobile it is already durational, it contains time compressed into a single frame”.⁵⁰

There are several pertinent visual motifs that run through the *200 Seconds* series and refer either to previous work or allegorically reflect upon relevant ideas. The book that features in the image *France, Summer 1979* (Fig. 8) is entitled *Life: A User's Manual* by the French writer Georges Perec.⁵¹ It is an incredibly large, complex novel, which consists of numerous interwoven stories based on the lives of the inhabitants of a fictitious Parisian apartment building. It was first published in France in 1979, which coincides, incidentally, with the year of the French family holiday being projected onto it within the image. Most pertinently, and particularly apposite with regard to the aforementioned association between photography and Bergson's memory-related concept of contraction, at the conclusion of this brilliantly convoluted book, Perec reveals that the whole novel actually takes place in a single moment. Beyond this direct reference to Perec, there are further, formal aspects, such as the domineering central presence of the book, and its stern-faced, white-cuffed reader, which purposely allude to the bible and preaching, and to a particular visual atmosphere so identifiable with the American South and early photography.



FIGURE 12. Hamish Gane, *200 Seconds (Kew, July 1969)*, (2007)

Within the work there are very few obvious references to the contemporary world, therefore with the inevitable vignetting and technical flaws associated with pin-hole exposures, the images have an air of early photography. In her curator's commentary for *Open Frequency*, Karen Ingham discusses this element of the work and identifies the hand on my daughter's head in the image *200 Seconds (Kew, July 1969)*, (Fig. 12), as "a gesture reminiscent of the head braces used by Victorian portrait photographers".⁵² This historical association was also noted by Pippa Oldfield in her keynote speech at the *Unreliable Truths* symposium in 2008, referring to the series as an "unconventional family album... that alludes back to 19th century portrait photography".⁵³ During the creation of these images I was certainly influenced by Michael Lesy's book *Wisconsin Death Trip* (1973),⁵⁴ in which he so ingeniously re-appropriates the work of Black River Falls photographer Charles Van Schaick, and there is also an attempt at evoking the Southern Gothic pathos of previously cited photographers such

as Ralph Eugene Meartyard, Emmet Gowin and Sally Mann, all of whom also made ‘family’ the primary subject of their work.



FIGURE 13. Hamish Gane, *200 Seconds (Kitwe, Summer 1967)*, (2008)

The marionette doll is another allegorical motif repeated within my work (see *200 Seconds (Kitwe, Summer 1967)*), (Fig. 13). It is also featured in the series *Apron*, discussed previously, as a play on the idea of a puppet master, and an ironic suggestion as to my true level (or lack) of control or influence within my immediate household, rather than an honest reflection of my patriarchal role (see *Apron (Marion)*), (Fig. 14). The motif of the marionette was acknowledged by Oldfield, who also suggested an association between puppetry and early portrait photography’s necessary use of constraints during long exposures.



FIGURE 14. Hamish Gane, *Apron (Marion)*, (C-type print, 2005)

She acknowledged that the marionette's white dress is echoed by that worn by my daughter in the previous image, (Fig. 12), and furthermore that my manipulative, controlling hand upon her head evokes a similar association related to constraint, or possibly something more sinister.⁵⁵

Within a year of my father's death, my partner's father also passed away, (they were both just fifty-nine years old). As had been long anticipated, my father's life ended following a drawn out battle with cancer. However, my partner's father died quite suddenly, and totally unexpectedly, from a stroke. This was obviously an enormous shock to my partner and I, and her family. He was an artist who had been a prolific portrait painter during the 70s and 80s whilst my partner was a child. His studio was in the middle of the house she grew up in, so she would see him painting every day. Although some of his paintings and drawings have remained with the family, much of his larger work was either painted for commission or sold at exhibition, and unfortunately there is no extensive photographic archive of his work. The

other important mnemonic element that exists in several of the *200 Seconds* images is that they are direct references to my partner's memories of her father's paintings, (see Fig. 15).

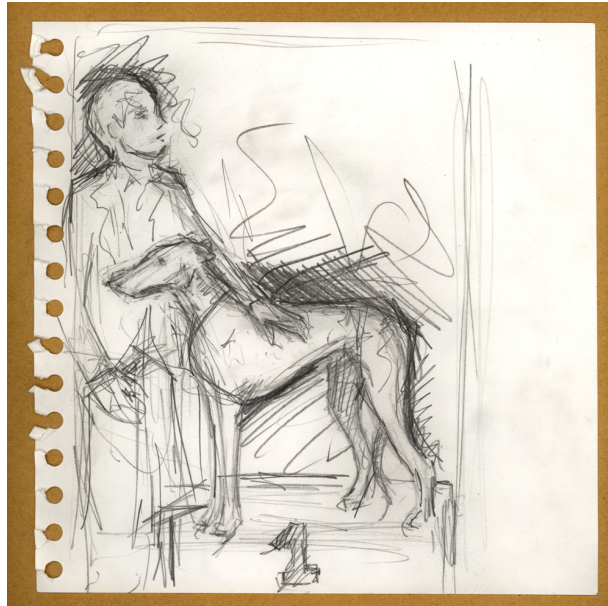


FIGURE 15. Georgia Simonds, *Memory Sketch*, 2008

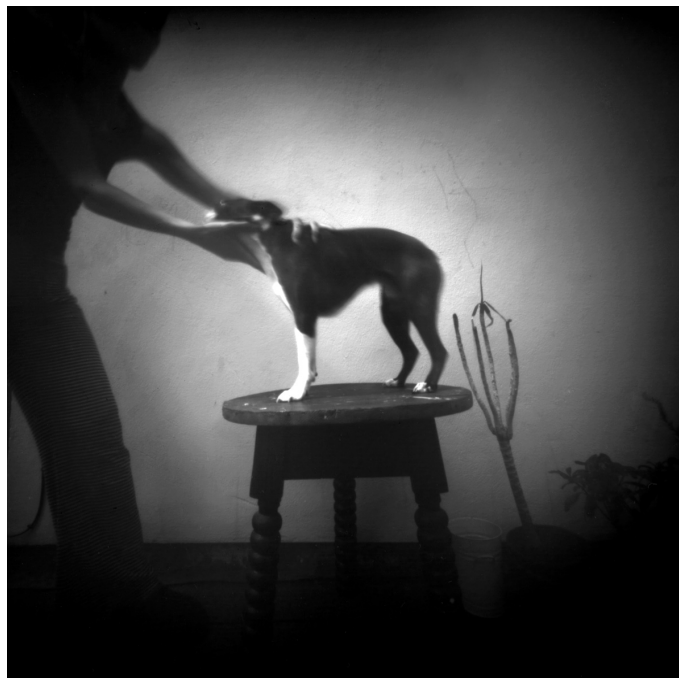


FIGURE 16. Hamish Gane, *200 Seconds (Amsterdam 1973)*, 2008

The image above, *200 Seconds (Amsterdam 1973)*, (Fig. 16), is loosely based upon the quick sketch (Fig. 15) that my partner made of a painting she remembers her father working on for several weeks or even months, commissioned in the 1970s by the proud owner of a prize-winning dog. Through a complex constellation of mnemonic associations, within this image there is an articulation of Bergson's 'contraction' of memory; my father's cine film footage projected onto my partner's enactment of her memory of a painting by her father, into the photographic present of the image itself, the seemingly straightforward depiction of our family pet. In another layer of reference, for the purposes of exhibition, this work has been printed to the same scale and dimensions as the white projection screen on which the films were repeatedly viewed on family occasions.

The physical and metaphorical multiplicity evident in the *200 Seconds* series led Pippa Oldfield to relate the work to the expression, 'mise-en-abîme'. As was explained during her talk, the French term *mise-en-abîme*, which literally means 'to place into the abyss', is now commonly used to describe the visual effect experienced when standing between two mirrors, where one sees one's reflection endlessly repeated,⁵⁶ and is also "accepted shorthand for referring to any part of a work that resembles the larger work in which it occurs".⁵⁷ The phrase was originally employed in literary and critical theory as an expression denoting "self-reflection within the structure of a literary work",⁵⁸ particularly to describe 'a story within a story'. The French writer André Gide, regarded as the first to use the term in this context, cites Shakespeare's use of the 'play with a play' in *Hamlet* as an example,⁵⁹ where in a one famous scene, a theatre company perform a play, 'The Murder of Gonzago', in which the events mirror the happenings of the play itself. A canonical visual example from the history of art is "Van Eyck's *Arnolfini* portrait, in which a mirror within the painting reflects the painted

scene from another angle”.⁶⁰ Inevitably, as Oldfield observes, this expression may be fittingly applied to all of photography, as it fundamentally produces reduced copies of the world, replicating itself repeatedly. However, the complex device of mise-en-abîme; of stories within stories, pictures within pictures, and memories within memories, is particularly resonant within this work, as multiple layers of narrative reverberate and contract into each image.

To conclude this chapter, I will initially refer to the celebrated essay, ‘Photography and Fetish’ (1985), in which Christian Metz specifically refers to the relationship between cinema and photography, emphasizing some of the differences in their reception, whilst also acknowledging their shared qualities. Although he recognizes that both modes of expression are “fundamentally indexical”,⁶¹ he primarily associates cinema with fiction and collectivity, and photography with reality and privacy (and therefore “more capable of becoming a fetish”).⁶² Within the essay, he suggests that film “gives back to the dead a semblance of life”, while photography, through its stillness, “maintains the memory of the dead *as being dead*.”⁶³ Although he acknowledges that the family is often privately celebrated with super-8 films, Metz also emphasizes that these films “*are still cinema*”.⁶⁴ Within Green’s analysis of Sugimoto’s *Theatres* photographs, similarly recorded during and within the projection of a film, he insists that “...life is given to the photograph through the death of the film”.⁶⁵ In the same way, the extended exposure photographs of *200 Seconds* are unquestionably not ‘still’. They exist within the space between photography and film, as Plummer has said, they are ‘already durational’, in fact they are, as Green describes, ‘the embodiment of temporal duration’. Damian Sutton concludes his significant study of photography, cinema and memory, by saying that photography’s “abundant richness is from time plunging into the photographic frame”.⁶⁶ Within the mise-en-abîme photographs of *200 Seconds*, via Bergson’s

mirroring of perception and recollection, of the virtual and the actual, there is a contraction of memory, and an amalgamation of photographic and cinematic time, offering new life to the images. The hypothesis in the title of this research appears to be under scrutiny with these dialectical images. There is a “drawing together”⁶⁷ of the spaces of *contradiction* that are photography, melancholy and family, and a *contraction* of all three. (Hence: Contra[di]ction)



FIGURE 17. Hamish Gane, *200 Seconds, (After Hiroshi)*, (2012)

I conclude the series with a photograph (Fig. 17), made with my grandfather's suitcase in homage to both Sugimoto and Jeff Wall.⁶⁸ Exposed for 200 seconds during the screening of my father's cine footage, which has now been digitally converted. In a further contraction of family, photography, memory and time, this is the room where the *Apron* series and much of the *200 Seconds* work was created, and the room in which my children now often watch their grandfather's digitized, silent, cine recordings on a high definition television.

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- ¹ Oliver Wendell Holmes, 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph', *The Atlantic Monthly* (June 1859), pp.728-748, cited in Beaumont Newhall (ed), *Photography: Essays and Images*, New York: MoMA, 1980, pp.60-61
- ² Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006), p.14
- ³ Professor John Sutton is Deputy Director at the Department of Cognitive Science, Macquarie University, Sydney. He is also co-editor of the Memory Studies book series for both Sage and Palgrave Macmillan publishers. His book, *Philosophy and Memory Traces: Descartes to Connectionism*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 1998.
- ⁴ John Sutton, "Memory", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2010 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), online, URL: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/memory>, (accessed 21.07.2011), (no pagination).
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ Thomas Suddendorf and Michael C. Corballis also write about this "...in addition to knowing something about a past event, one has to meta-represent this knowledge and attribute it to the experience of an earlier self in order to mentally travel into the past. Re-experiencing the event, that is, representing how this information became known, demands some understanding of the contingency between perception and the formation of knowledge," Thomas Suddendorf & Michael Corballis, 'Mental time travel and the evolution of the human mind', *Genetic Social and General Psychology Monographs*, 123:2, (1997), p.10
- ⁷ Sutton, *op. cit.*
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ Bergson is first introduced and discussed within the previous chapter entitled, *A Surfeit of Affect*, (see p.210, n. 23)
- ¹¹ Keith Ansell-Pearson, 'Bergson on Memory', in Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (eds), *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p.61. Ansell-Pearson goes on to say: "For Bergson, memory is linked to creative duration and to *sense*."
- ¹² Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, [1966], (trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam), (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p.37
- ¹³ Damien Sutton, *Photography, Cinema, Memory: The Crystal Image of Time*, (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p.34
- ¹⁴ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, [1912], trans: Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer, (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), p.24
- ¹⁵ Henri Bergson, *Mind-Energy: Lectures and Essays* [1920], (Classic Reprint), (Charleston, South Carolina: Forgotten Books, 2010), p.165
- ¹⁶ Damien Sutton, *op.cit.*, p.54
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.55
- ¹⁸ Siegfried Kracauer, 'Photography' [1927], (trans. Thomas Y. Levin), *Critical Inquiry*, 19:3 (1993), pp.425
- ¹⁹ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, *op.cit.*, p.31, cited in Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: theses on the photography of history*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p.90
- ²⁰ Cadava, *op cit.*, p.91
- ²¹ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, *op.cit.*, pp.29-30
- ²² *Ibid.*, p.25 and p.76
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p.124
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.125
- ²⁵ In his description of the 'optical unconscious' that photography reveals, Benjamin says: "However skilful the photographer, however carefully he poses his model, the spectator feels an irresistible compulsion to look for the tiny spark of a chance, of the here and now, with which, in the immediacy of that long-past moment, the future so persuasively inserts itself that, looking back, we may discover it". Walter Benjamin, 'A short history of photography', [1931], (trans. Stanley Mitchell), *Screen*, 13:1, (1972), p.7
- ²⁶ Bergson, *op.cit.*, p.125
- ²⁷ Deleuze, *op. cit.*, p.54
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.54
- ²⁹ Ansell-Pearson, *op. cit.*, p.73
- ³⁰ Jay Prosser, *Light in the Dark Room: Photography and Loss*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p.1
- ³¹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, (London: Vintage Books, 1993), p.33

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- ³² Hiroshi Sugimoto (b.1948), is a Japanese artist who lives and works in Tokyo, Japan and New York City, USA. He works predominantly with photography, using a10x8 large format camera to produce series. These photographic series have included seascapes, movie theaters, natural history dioramas and waxworks. Most of the series explore the relationship of photography and time, and/or photography and reality.
- ³³ David Green, 'Marking Time: Photography, Film and Temporalities of the Image' in David Green and Joanna Lowry (eds), *Stillness and Time: Photography and the Moving Image*, (Brighton: Photoforum/Photoworks, 2006), p.9
- ³⁴ Thierry de Duve, 'Time Exposure and the Snapshot: The Photograph as Paradox', *October*, No. 5, MIT Press, (1978), pp.115-116
- ³⁵ de Duve, *op cit.*, pp.113-125
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.121
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.113
- ³⁸ Walter Benjamin, 'A short history of photography', [1931], (trans. Stanley Mitchell), *Screen*, 13:1, (1972), pp. 5-26
- ³⁹ Mary Ann Doanne, 'Real Time: Instantaneity and the Photographic Imaginary', in Green and Lowry (eds), *op cit.*, p.25
- ⁴⁰ This has relevance to my earlier discussion regarding the 'lost object' within the psychological definitions for melancholia put forward by Freud and Kristeva, (see *The Crypt of the Inexpressible Affect* chapter).
- ⁴¹ Benjamin, *op cit.*, p.17
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, p.18, Benjamin's concept of aura is discussed within Part I, during the chapter *A Magic, Not an Art*, see particularly pp.43-45
- ⁴³ Sandra Plummer, 'Photography and Duration: Time Exposure and Time-Image', *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*, Issue 23, (2012), online, URL: <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue23/plummer/index.html>, (accessed 08.08.2012), (no pagination)
- ⁴⁴ Bergson, from *Creative Evolution* [1911], cited by Plummer, *op cit.*
- ⁴⁵ Plummer, *op cit.*
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁵¹ Georges Perec, (1936-1982), was a French writer and filmmaker, His novel, *Life: A User's Manual*, was published in France in 1979, with an English translation in 1987. Georges Perec, *Life: A User's Manual*, (trans. David Bellos), (London: Collins Harvill, 1987)
- ⁵² Karen Ingham, 'Hamish Gane', Open Frequency 2009, *Axis Online Resource for Contemporary Art*, URL: <http://www.axisweb.org/ofSARF.aspx?SELECTIONID=19720> , (accessed 21.08.10)
- ⁵³ Pippa Oldfield, (recording made by Swansea Metropolitan University) was keynote speaker at the symposium *Unreliable Truths: Transformation and Illusion in Contemporary Photographic Practice* at Dynevor Centre for Art, Design and Media, 7th November 2008, in association with the exhibition of the same name at Glyn Vivian Art Gallery, 27th September-30th November, 2008.
- ⁵⁴ Michael Lesy, *Wisconsin Death Trip*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000. The book, first published in 1973, is based on a large collection of late 19th century photographs taken in Black River Falls, Wisconsin, by Charles Van Schaick, which are combined with local news reports from the same period.
- ⁵⁵ Oldfield, *op cit.*
- ⁵⁶ Oldfield, *op cit.*
- ⁵⁷ William Nelles, quoted from the explanation for 'mise en abyme' in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, (edited by David Herman, Manfred Jahn & Marie-Laure Ryan), (Abingdon, Oxfordshire & New York: Routledge, 2005), pp.312-313
- ⁵⁸ The OED definition of 'mise en abyme, n.' (*Literary Theory*) is: "(A term denoting) self-reflection within the structure of a literary work; a work employing self-reflection". OED Online. September 2012. Oxford University Press. URL: <http://www.oed.com.v-ezproxy.smu.ac.uk/view/Entry/245796?redirectedFrom=mise+en+abyme>, (accessed 19.09.2012).
- ⁵⁹ One of the quotation examples given by the OED is from *Comparative Literature Studies* (8 ii, 1971), p.125, "In an early passage of his *Journal* Andre Gide described the literary and artistic procedure of interior duplication now widely referred to as 'mise en abyme', or 'inescutcheon'. His examples included the inner play of *Hamlet*, passages in Goethe and Poe, and various paintings in which mirrors reflect aspects within the pictures

themselves". OED Online. September 2012. Oxford University Press. URL: <http://www.oed.com.v-ezproxy.smu.ac.uk/view/Entry/245796?redirectedFrom=mise+en+abyme>, (accessed 19.09.2012).

⁶⁰ Nelles, *op cit.*, p.312

⁶¹ Christian Metz, 'Photography and Fetish', *October*, No 34, MIT Press, (1985), p.82

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.90

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.84

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.82

⁶⁵ Green, *op cit.*, p.10

⁶⁶ Damian Sutton, *op cit.*, p.234

⁶⁷ One OED definition for contraction is, "The action of drawing together or collecting", "contraction, n.", *OED Online*, September 2012, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com.v-ezproxy.smu.ac.uk/view/Entry/40343?redirectedFrom=contraction> (accessed 20.10.2012)

⁶⁸ I refer of course to Sugimoto's *Theatres* series and to Wall's well known image, *A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai)* (1993), mentioned previously in Chapter 3, *Apron*, p.162 and p.180 (n.13)