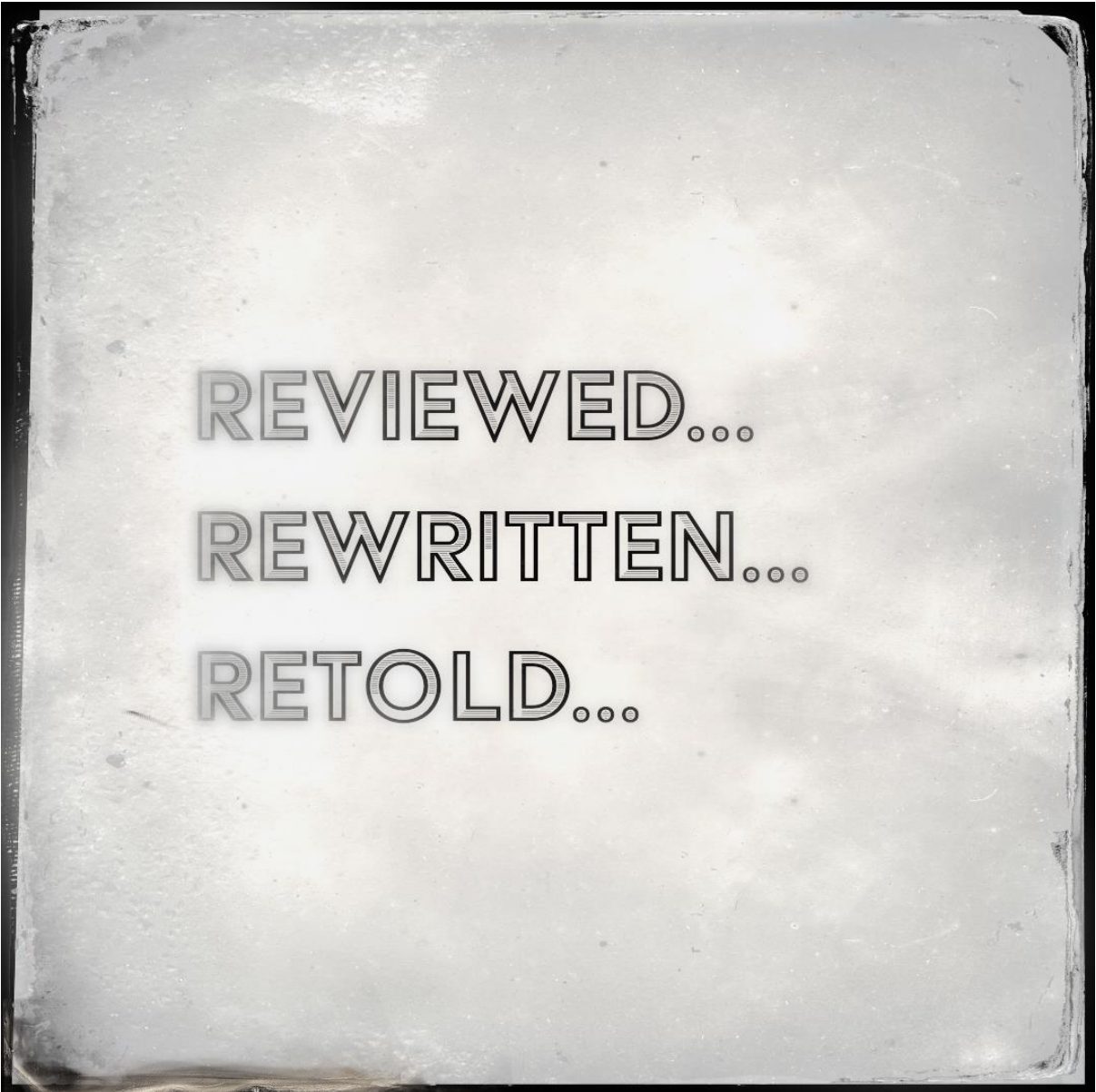




REVIEWED...

REWRITTEN...

RETOLD...

Reviewed...

Rewritten...

Retold...

Andrew Breeding (2203234)

MA Contemporary Dialogues (Photography)

Confirmative Praxis ADAA7002

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Chapter	Page
1 Introduction	p4
2 Equipment	p8
3 Memory & Archive	p13
4 Process	p15
5 Conclusion and Critical Reflection	p24
Bibliography	p26
Appendix 1	p29

1. Introduction

Thesis IX: In a world that is *really upside down*, the true is a moment of the false. (Debord, 1967, p. 9)

Alzheimer's disease turns your world upside down. Really upside down. To see my father lose his memories, have frightening hallucinations and subsequently die of the disease was the hardest thing I had ever been through. To see my mother start off on the same path has been harder still. It feels like the odds are stacked against me and one day, in the not too distant future, my destination will be that awful, unstoppable fate. It also means that one tends to think about memory all the time – I notice mine getting worse as I get older, where I used to remember a phone number the first time someone told me, I now have difficulty remembering the name of the person I've just finished a conversation with.

Philosopher and filmmaker Guy Debord was not talking about memory problems in *Society of the Spectacle*, although Thesis IX could easily be the subject. He assigned the word 'spectacle' to the moments lived through life leading to a multiplicity of representations – in other words the events of one's life become your memories that you can look back upon. He goes on to say that these memories can sometimes get muddled (falsified), and your memory of a moment then becomes something different to what it was.

The spectacle that falsifies reality is nevertheless a real product of that reality, while lived reality is materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle and ends up absorbing it and aligning itself with it. (ibid., p.8)

My feeling of mortality has encouraged me to do something I rarely used to – look back at old photographs. I do not have many old photographs from the days of analogue cameras, but I do have a lot of photos saved on Google Photos - nearly 20,000 – the modern day equivalent of photo albums and a box in the loft. These have come from digital cameras I have had over the years and from smartphones. The quality isn't always great and, as a photography student, I should be embarrassed at some of the composition and editing choices I made before I understood what I was doing, but these are a record of that moment in time and the opportunity to capture these photos will never reoccur. They are my history and history cannot be changed: as Pierre Nora states the "...so-called rekindling of memory is actually its final flicker as it is consumed by history's flames" (Nora, 1984, p.62.)

Interestingly, Nora suggests that society has a need to store everything and have archives to refer to. He wrote this in 1984, before the mass availability of computers and the space they require, and before the Internet was even invented. He seems to have predicted that not only the state has a need to store information in an archive, but that individuals will also be doing the same (ibid). The one thing he did get wrong was the need to choose what information would be stored. Whilst this was true in 1984, as can be attested by my lack of photos from my youth and early adulthood, now there is no need to choose. Everything can be stored on cloud services allowing us to go back to whenever we want in a matter of seconds. Would the smell of Proust's mother's

madeleine cake now have him reaching in his memory or reaching for his smartphone for confirmation of what is remembered?

Looking through these photos has brought the memories flooding back, but I cannot be sure if what I think I am remembering is what was happening at the time. I remember most of the places where the photos were made, but only in the context of that picture. Sometimes the wider memories are harder to tie down. Ricoeur quotes Bergson: “No doubt a recollection, as it becomes actual, tends to live in an image...” (Bergson, unknown, quoted in Ricoeur, 2004, p.68). This is what old images will do. They force you to confront what was taken, why it was taken and the context it was taken until you either remember exactly what happened or you put a meaning to it based on your recollection, no matter how hazy, of the event.

My photographic archive, 25 years old this year, is poorly organised. It has only half a dozen ‘albums’ set up, but luckily I can easily find a picture because of geo-location (if the picture was taken on a smartphone), almost certainly by date (if on digital compact cameras or DSLRs I remembered to set the date correctly) and now, with the machine learning tools employed by Google, I can just ask it to find a picture of “Dad” or “boat” and it does so with frighteningly good accuracy.

A mixture of smartphones and more traditional digital cameras have built my archive, and it seems only right that I explore it to see if Bergson was right and I can find the memories in my photographs.

2. Equipment

Imagine ... after the photographer had spent a century learning how to use his medium in monochrome, what chaos resulted when he was suddenly presented with cheap and virtually foolproof color film. The technical geniuses who developed this wonderful advance assumed, naturally, that more was better, and that the old pictures plus color could only be more natural. (Szarkowski, 2002, p. 8)

John Szarkowski was writing in the exhibition catalogue (better known as “William Eggleston’s Guide”) for the 1976 landmark event “Photographs by William Eggleston”, the first time an exhibition of purely colour pictures held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Eggleston’s pictures were of mundane subjects (the type that had been taken for years previously) but as they were in colour there was somewhat of a shock amongst the artistic elite in New York. Writing in the New York Times in 1976 art critic Hilton Kramer said of the exhibition:

Perfect? Perfectly banal, perhaps. Perfectly boring, certainly. A perfect example of what, for Mr. Szarkowski and many like-minded connoisseurs of contemporary photography, is now a la mode...What does make this show unusual, if not exactly historic, is that it is the museum's first major exhibition of photographs in color...The truth is, these pictures belong to the world of snapshot chic... (Kramer, 1976)

Kramer’s issues with the exhibition were that the photographs were banal, that colour photography was inappropriate for ‘high art’ and didn’t deserve the focus of an

exhibition in such a high-profile venue. Nearly 50 years on from the exhibition it wouldn't be controversial to say that Kramer had it wrong and Szarkowski was a visionary in the photographic world.

One wonders what Szarkowski and Kramer would have made of the cameras always carried in our pockets. It would not be unreasonable to assume that Szarkowski would embrace the technology and be a champion for galleries having exhibitions of smartphone photography whilst Kramer would be horrified at “the world of snapshot chic” on Instagram. Of course, we will never know their true feelings, although it does seem smartphone photography is becoming accepted as a valid form of the art. The Guardian newspaper has weekly feature on photographers' best smartphone pictures like this one by French photo-editor Stéphane Arnaud (Holliday, 2023), the latest step in its mainstream acceptance.



In 2010 Damon Winter shot a series of pictures for the New York Times, 'A Grunt's Life' using an iPhone and, in particular, he used the Hipstamatic app. The series of pictures won third prize in 'Feature Picture Story' category of the 'Picture of the Year' competition. The pictures all have a distinct look, that of being taken with

Hipstamatic. In the early days of the app there was a distinct bias towards green tones which, looking back at my early Hipstamatic shots is very evident. With the many updates of the app there were soon many different, more colourful options available (as well as a number of black and white variations). In an interview with Steve Myers, Winter explains that by using his iPhone he was able to put the soldiers at ease during their rest time whereas the rest of the time he was covering them he was using more “professional” cameras and video equipment. (Myers, 2011). The march of iPhoneography hasn’t slowed down since.

Halpern and Humphreys (2016) examined the phenomenon of iPhoneography (a generic name for pictures taken on smartphones in general, and the Apple iPhone in particular) and discussed their use along with the opportunities they give a user to immediately change the look of a picture to one they find more aesthetically pleasing. The technology has moved on a lot since the days of their study but the core apps they talk about, like Hipstamatic, are still available along with a myriad of new apps and abilities the software and hardware manufacturers have added to phones. There are still regular debates on social media about the validity of smartphones as a camera of choice with photographers, with purists dismissing them and others making pictures so good it is impossible to tell that they use a smartphone. There are, of course, debates on which camera model is the best always happening on social media so this perhaps isn’t the most reliable source of opinion.



(Winter, 2011)

Now, it is virtually impossible to go to a major event without there being a wall of people with their phones raised high in the air taking photos on their phone, sometimes not even sure if the subject of their pictures is in frame. When attending a wedding you can normally tell the professionally hired photographer, lurking around with at least one expensive looking DSLR, trying to get the participants in the frame. They spend as much time begging guests not to get in their way with their smartphones randomly flashing and covering the faces of all the other guests. The photographer is expected to turn up with their expensive looking kit and to produce the pictures perceived to be of value, rather than using the same smartphone as a guest. It doesn't take much imagination to see a bride's horror if their £1000 a day photographer turned up with the latest iPhone rather than a camera that matches their stereotype of "professional" camera. I've thought about this conundrum several times whilst producing "Reviewed...Rewritten...Retold". If I still have a demon at the back of mind saying that iPhone pictures are not good enough, how many other photographers are also struggling with this?

The mantra often cited by photographers, amateur and professional, is “the best camera is the one you have with you” and the same could be said about editing photographs too. Hipstamatic is an instant editing device, as are most digital cameras when they are used. DSLR cameras have editing software built into them and if the picture is taken in JPG format, the camera, rather like Hipstamatic, decides the best editing setting for you there and then. Even when pictures are taken using the RAW format, whichever editing software you are using has built in presets and programmed ideas of how the manipulation you decide upon looks – using an app or an editing suite is giving over control of your artistic choice (at varying levels) to a program that someone else made.

The other fundamental part of the photographic art that has changed over time is the printing of photographs. In ‘the old days’ of analogue photography pretty much the only option available to see what had been shot was to print it or show it as a projected slide. Today, with digital cameras, the tendency is not to print all photographs and just to view them digitally. Jacques Derrida wrote about avant-guard artist Antonin Artaud and his use of “subjectile” in his art. Artaud called the paper that he painted on his “subjectile”. In his book about Artaud, Derrida discussed his use of this term in regard to his art, but did not use this to refer to photography (Walton, 2015). However, when Derrida was interviewed by Hubertus Von Amelnunxen and Michael Wetzels, he used the concept of the subjectile to distinguish between analogue and digital photography. He argued that the film analogue photography uses is the equivalent of Artaud’s paper, and because digital photography, which was still in its infancy at the time of the interview, did not have a physical presence it did not have this subjectile. The mass use of screens now, whether computer, tablet or phone, somewhat overwrites this. People will use their devices to show people their pictures and, for the brief time a

picture is displayed the screen becomes the paper a photograph is painted on, it becomes the subjectile.

3. Memory and Archive

Reviewed...Rewritten...Retold is primarily a project about memory. Everyone has them and we are making new ones all the time. The good ones stay with us, the bad ones too - some may say even stronger than the good ones - and we lose them regularly as they become distant and inconsequential. During sleep our brains process them, sort them, discard them and as we get older, they become confused, unreliable and lost.

Memories are created by the events of our lives. We will tend to remember the good things in life and hopefully not remember so vividly the bad things. Sounds, situations and smells all help us remember, even reminiscing and talking about things bring memories clearer but one thing does it more than anything - a picture. Photographs are the ultimate holder of memories for most people. We remember our own lives through them, and the collective memory of the world has, since the invention of photography, been held in photographs. The proliferation of digital and internet storage means our pictures are always available. With photo sharing apps, such as Instagram, we are more than ever willing to share our lives with other people.

In 1956 a short document was published by Guy Debord and Gil Wolman entitled "A User's Guide to Détournement". They used the word "détournement" to describe the act of appropriation, advocating the concept of 'minor détournements' and 'deceptive



détournements'. (Debord & Wolman, 1956, p2). Debord and Wolman started their 'User Guide' by addressing the idea that the likes of Marcel Duchamp had pushed the boundaries of art by doing something as simple as drawing a moustache on a print of the Mona Lisa.

(Duchamp, 1919)

They felt that by doing this Duchamp had added nothing of value to the picture, with the implication that the Dada and Surrealists had used this technique so many times over the years that my merely adding a moustache to the Mona Lisa, nothing new had been achieved. In fact, they are so unimpressed with its value it does not even make the definition of a minor détournement. Debord and Wolman class a minor détournement as something that changes something that has no value and give examples of a simple newspaper clipping or a "commonplace photograph" (Debord & Wolman, 1956, p2).

My usual practice is photographing the urban landscape. I like to take photographs of the uglier side of life, like random graffiti and tags, advertising posters, stickers on lamp posts. They are mainly pictures of someone else's art taken without acknowledgement of who the artist is. This could be problematic to some, but to me it is a minor détournement. I'm taking something of little importance to the general population and turning it into something else, something that has a different interpretation once put into a new work. In this project I have taken that one step further by taking my own work, either a picture appropriating someone else's work or an original photograph and détourning them to something very different.

4. Process

...and he owes his works to the body of the photograph, embalmed in and by the photocopy, repository of photographic remains; he owes his works to the invention of the photocopy of the photograph, an invention that automatically chars, perforates, pales, iodizes, drains, congests, weakens, dehydrates, shrivels, shrinks, stifles, rusts, burns, salinizes, pollutes, tars, frays and erodes the skin of the photographic body, preserving it in destruction (Dittborn, 1976)

This excerpt from Eugenio Dittborn's 'Triptych' is very similar to the arguments that Walter Benjamin (2008) uses describing the aura and how it dissipates with the act of mechanical reproduction. The 'aura' was Benjamin's way of describing the feeling one has when seeing a work of art 'in person'. His argument is that when a work of art, (the often used example is the Mona Lisa), is copied many times, the thing that made it so special – its aura – begins to disappear and, eventually, it will not have the same meaning as it had when it could only be seen in person. Although the technologies they are describing are very different, the effect is the same. Benjamin's referred to method of mechanical reproduction is film (and subsequent prints) whilst Dittborn is looking at the photocopier, removing the aura from photographs, the next step. These arguments could easily be taken to the next stage – is iPhoneography just jumping a stage where the aura is being directly removed by an app and adapting what we see to suit the app, rather than our memory of a situation.

Let's look at how the images have been processed by the camera application. From what I understand, a standard set of rules is applied to each image as it is taken. It is not the case that an image is taken and then a filter is chosen and applied later. A photo is taken and then you must wait between five and 10

seconds or so as the image is processed before you can take the next one. Every image receives what seems to be a pretty similar treatment, which involves a color-balance shift, burning of predetermined areas of the frame and increased contrast. (Myers, 2011)

Hipstamatic has evolved since Myers was using it on the Afghan battlefields. The relative slowness of the app was one of its selling points when it was originally released. By being able to see it develop in front of your eyes was meant to invoke the memories of old time processing, especially the Polaroid camera. With the latest versions of the software the 'developing' of the pictures is virtually instantaneous. The user can take several shots at a time, and, by a shake of the camera, a random set of film, lens and flash will be selected by the software. There is no Artificial Intelligence (AI) involved in the process, just 'old fashioned' programming. As Hipstamatic has been improved and the number of film/lens/flash combinations has been increased it has become harder to use as a lot of experimentation is required to get a particular look. The original photos that I 'reviewed' were taken using both versions of the app (see Appendix One) and, although I would be unable to be sure, were all probably taken using random settings. It is little details like this that my memory has dismissed, and the software doesn't tell you what how the combination was chosen.

The process I have used in creating my final pictures has been quite brutal on the original pictures, and for them to come out the other-side as recognisable is quite a feat. After the colourisation process some of the pictures have become subjectively more beautiful than the original - the picture "Growth" is the best example. A poorly composed, washed-out picture of a tree has become an object of beauty.



(Breeding, 2012)



(Breeding, 2023a)

A very strict process was used in producing this project.

The pictures were reviewed on my phone to choose a long list of pictures to rewrite. There were nearly 2000 pictures which were eventually narrowed down to 73. There was no artistic criteria used for selection, but the picture had to have some kind of relevance to me and to evoke a particularly strong memory, whether that was from years ago or more recently.

Once the pictures were selected, I chose a shortlist of 32. There was a very specific reason for this – I only wanted to use four packs of Polaroid film (I had a spare pack just for emergencies). The Polaroid pictures were all taken in one session and not looked at for several hours whilst they developed. This manual stage is very important to the look and meaning of the pictures. The taking of them on film means that the pictures exist outside of a computer as an indexical item, the only hardcopy of the picture.

The Polaroid is then scanned back into a computer. Derrida uses the argument that “A photocopy is, after all, a photograph, isn’t it?” (ibid, p.26) and a scan uses the same sort of technology as a photocopy, so is a scan a photograph too? Technically it is, but the aura has gone. The digital copy of the Polaroid has no presence, it has no subjectile. Using a television screen as the subject of the picture has stripped it right back. The blueish hue is a response of the lens and film of the Polaroid to the harsh light of the monitor. A further question arises too: have I taken a picture of the tree or have I taken a picture of the television screen that happens to have a tree on it? It depends on the intent when the photograph was taken. My intent was certainly taking a picture of the tree, it did not matter what the tree was displayed on.



(Breeding, 2023b)

Once scanned, the picture is moved back to the iPhone via ‘the cloud’, a group of computer servers somewhere on earth. The picture once again only exists as computer code. It is then processed through Hipstamatic as a TinType (a film and lens

meant to give the picture an old tin type style look), ready to be upload to yet another server before it is printed. The final version of the digital TinType is then processed through another app to give the distinctive coloured look.

This work has gone through several different technical processes, from the initial picture making on a smartphone through a variety of processes until they are eventually printed and displayed on a wall, begging the question of are they still photographs or are they now a piece of digital art? I believe they are no longer photographs, in the same way painters will initially take photographs of their subject and paint directly from there. As discussed, it is arguable whether they were ever photographs in the first place, they were more of a representation that had been programmatically altered by the Hipstamatic app. The only point they became actual photographs was when the Hipstamatic print was photographed on a Polaroid camera. Once developed, however, the prints were scanned and once again, became digital copies.

“...of all the objects in the world: why choose (why photograph) this object, this moment, rather than some other?” (Barthes, 1982, p.6) is a question that I have asked a lot as I’ve reviewed my old Hipstamatic photographs. I am lucky that I know where I took the photographs – that is something I do remember well - but if I were to forget the pictures have geo-tagging enabled on them. A quick look at the metadata and I can accurately tell you to a few metres where it was taken. The why of taking the photograph is a different matter entirely.



(Breeding, 2013)

This picture of Blackpool Tower is quite recognisable. Looking at my camera roll I have lots of pictures of Blackpool Tower so why this needed to be taken from this position, at this time has long been forgotten. Hipstamatic has given it a unique look with the lens (Foxy) and the film (Blanko C16), but this photo is banal. Apart from bring back a memory of a good holiday it holds little photographic value, Barthes would have called it a *unary* photograph (Barthes, 1981, p.41), a photograph that serves the purpose of just being a photograph. There is nothing notable about it. However, once my process to rewrite the photograph is underway a *punctum* begins to show itself.



(Breeding, 2023c)

The picture has been turned into a digital 'Tin Type' picture. Now, Blackpool Tower is blurry, raising up into the sky which has been rendered in an exaggerated version of the original. The Tower becomes the undoubted subject of the picture. The promenade and its steps and walls have disappeared to just leave a blackness from which the structure rises.

In the final colourised picture, the transformation is complete.



(Breeding, 2023d)

The tower stands out into the slightly menacing sky, with a yellow glow behind. The punctum is the illumination shining between the metal girders. It grabs your attention, and it isn't letting the gaze of your eye go anywhere else. That is my interpretation, but everyone will have their own. By his use of 'punctum' Barthes reveals it as an individual reaction to a photograph and will be different for everyone who sees it.

Using a picture by Robert Mapplethorpe of Robert Wilson and Philip Glass (ibid, p. 51), Barthes feels that Wilson (right) holds his eye more, but he cannot say why. The punctum of the picture eludes him, and he ends up describing as a paradox. For me, the split in the wall is the think that breaks out of the picture (the punctum),



(Mapplethorpe, 1976)

As with all art, the ideas are all subjective. The aura, studium, punctum and every other term conceived to describe photographs, and every other form of art, all boil down to a single question – do you like it? If the answer is yes, it is a great piece of art.

5. Conclusion and Critical Reflection

My main reason for taking this MA was to remove myself from the constraints of being 'just a photographer'. I am quite confident that I could produce any number of meaningful and well defined projects from behind the camera, but I knew for this final stage of my education I needed to make something more unique. From the outset I was unsure what I wanted to present but I knew it had to be about memory for the reasons outlined in the introduction.

By starting to investigate my own archives – not only photographs but a collection of tickets, brochures, and souvenirs - I wanted to see if something could be made that was of interest. I kept being drawn to old photographs and the often strange pictures that Hipstamatic would produce and using these in relation to memory was an obvious way forward.

Being able to come out of my comfort zone of just taking my usual urban landscape photographs has been a challenge but I feel with this final portfolio I have made something that is beautiful, but also shows that using and combining alternate methods of photography it is possible to make something different and unique. There are things I would do differently if I were to make a similar project. For example, rather than using Hipstamatic twice in the process I would like to experiment with using other camera formats, but that is for another day.

My initial thoughts were to investigate memory, and that has been one of the outcomes of my praxis, but I have also looked closely at the process involved in using a smart

phone and addressing its use in art. I feel comfortable that it is possible to make something quite unique with a smartphone and it is as worthy for use in photography as the most expensive Leica is.

While my future practice will be very much camera based, the ability to give myself the permission and freedom to experiment with different mediums has given me a much needed creativity in my life and the knowledge that it is okay to try different things in life, even as you are standing on the precipice of your golden years.

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Appendix One

Apps used in my project.

Hipstamatic

Hipstamatic first came to my knowledge in 2011 and I have used it ever since, except for a hiatus during 2018 and 2023 when I had an Android phone. There are two versions of the app available.

‘Paks’ are groups of film, lens and flash used for the various effects in Hipstamatic. They can be used as provided or mixed and matched with other films, lenses and flashes to provide unique effects.

The Classic version where ‘paks’ are available for purchase. This is the version of the app I used prior to getting my latest phone in September 2023. App store link:

<https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/hipstamatic-classic/id342115564>

The newer version is a subscription-based model giving access to all ‘paks’. I have used this app since September 2023 with an iPhone 15 Plus. App store link:

<https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/hipstamatic/id1450672436>

Colorize Images

This is a subscription app for colourising black and white images using machine learning. App store link:

<https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/colorize-images/id1526058219>