

Research in Practice. Dissertation Proposal

Body. Testimony. Reason

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Body. Testimony. Reason

SUBJECT MATTER (?)

This independent project will examine a man in photography, not only as flesh but in self-knowledge as a spiritual creature. Also, since my experience is unusual, I will write in an autoethnographic style, speaking from personal experience and understanding.

Imagine the eye. An eye that is not a human's eye. An eye that is not subject to subjectivity. Which is not mine. Which is not yours. Which belongs to no one. Imagine an eye that belongs to no one who sees you. And not only. Seeing it perpetuates you. Stops time. Closes in space, on paper, locks with a lock whose key have never been and will never be. It is the eye that shows you. It is the eye that allows you to see your face as the Other. For yourself, you become the Other who lives in you. Other- who is becoming closer to you than you could ever be. Imagine no one's eye allowing you to see yourself. Yourself with Other's face, which is another one in you.

CHAPTER 1

Body



Figure 1 (Bo, 2017)

Who is a man? It is studied as a body in physiology, a soul in psychology, and a social being in sociology. In the concepts of existentialism and personalism, human personality is fundamental, and these philosophies dispute that a man can be viewed in only one way: biologically, psychologically, socially, or spiritually. We see man as both nature and history, which we interpret by objectively refining culture, recognising the context of human action and thought, and analysing events based on motivations, circumstances, and naturalistic realities. Spirit, mind, virtue, these characteristics - not the zoological classification - make a man a moral, political, legal subject and object.

In fact, man can see himself in two ways: as a research subject or as a free being unaffected by any research. In one case, we think of man as an entity, while in another, we think of him as a non-object fact rooted in inaccurate self-perception. We cannot understand what man is by understanding him, but we can feel it by delving into the roots of our thought and behaviour.

In philosophy, "man" could be understood differently. In Scripture, the word "soul" more than once means human life or the whole human person. "The soul of man is immortal and imperishable." (Plato). According to Plato, the essence of man is his soul; the body is the prison of the soul, the temporary abode. The soul in most religions is called an independent metaphysical substance that exists within each person.

Atoms are the fundamental components of matter. They are the ones that literally form our world.

Our bodies do not decompose into nothingness when we die; instead, they are broken down into their constituent parts and recycled back into the environment. In other words, our atoms continue to exist even after we have passed away. It is best revealed in Sally Mann's series *Matter Lent*, which she presented in 2000. Sally Mann photographed decomposing bodies at the University of Tennessee's Body Farm, where bodies donated for research.



Figure 2 (Mann, 2000)

Funeral rituals are one of the most significant aspects reflecting society itself, the relationships of the people who live in it and their attitudes towards life and death. Although funeral habits are changing, certain decisions remain out of time, one of which is to say goodbye to the deceased. Traditionally in my homeland (Lithuania), a man is buried on the third day after death. This tradition is linked to the belief that the soul leaves the body and rises to eternal life on the third day after death.

The first time I saw a dead person, was in 1996: this year died my beloved Grandmother and Great Grandmother. I was standing by the coffin and looking at someone who was not the person I knew all my life; there was a wax figure without any sign of life in it, and it looked like it had never been. She was dressed in an azure dress with laces. And I remembered that one month before she died, Grandmother showed me this dress and admired: "I will be beautiful with this dress, just like a bride on her wedding day." My Grandmother raised her son alone; we never knew who the father was. Meanwhile, when I needed to kiss her hands to say goodbye, I did not feel soft skin; instead, my lips touched something cold. I could not cry at that moment as I cannot accept that my family member is here in front of me; I could not recognise her. The night after the funeral's I had a dream: My Grandmother came into my room and sat on the bed. She had beautiful little sparkles in her eyes, and they were full of love. She hugged me so hard, and I felt nothing but love with my whole body. I woke up straight away and still was catching air. I felt the presence of my Grandmother with all my skin- I knew she was here! She came to say goodbye to me...



Figure 3



Figure 4

Unfortunately, later in 1999, when my father died, I could not hold my emotions. The body that was strong enough to lift my sister and me, was hopeless in front of cancer, and my Father looked tiny and skinny in that coffin. And the fact he was not in pain anymore provided relief. Sadly, my mum decided to burn the photographs..."I want to remember him alive – not dead" - she sighed...

Moreover, mum was right because the last half-year when my Father was at home (the hospital could not help any more), cancer "ate" him alive...The only sense of humour that he had still was here, but the jokes were not sounded fun anymore. I remember I came to his bedroom - he was smiling..."You know", - he whispered- "I opened my eyes and saw someone put biscuits on my chest for me; I tried to take one and found it was my fingers..." My Father died at home before Christmas.

According to philosopher/astrologer Joseph Landwehr, the unity of body and soul is so close that the soul can be considered the "form" of the body; hence, made of matter, influenced by the spiritual soul, the body becomes a human and living body. The soul usually considered immortal and eternal; believed, the soul detached from the body at the time of death. The soul (Latin anima) in most religions is called an independent metaphysical substance that exists within each person. The Latin word spiritus has its root in the word "soul" and translates to "breath". The belief in eternal life is comforting me. It makes me feel safe knowing that the people we loved did not leave us forever. That one day, we will meet, and we will celebrate life - eternal life without pain.

"All our knowledge begins with the senses, proceeds then to the understanding, and ends with reason. There is nothing higher than reason." (Kant)

Kant concluded that to understand the universe, humans must enforce those concepts on the knowledge that their minds receive. The mind is constantly interpreting what it sees or encounters, which is vital for it to make sense of it.

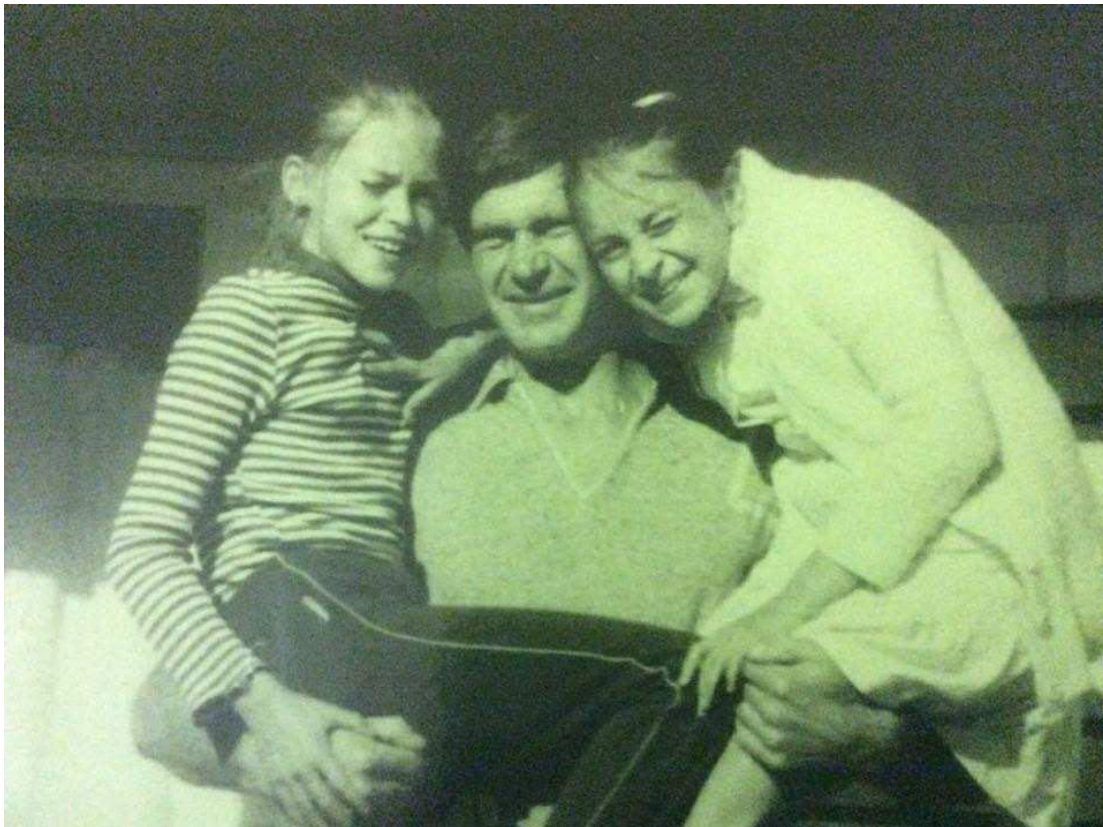


Figure 5



Figure 6

CHAPTER 2

Testimony

Does the afterlife really exist, and is it possible to capture proof of the existence of the human soul? Philosophers of all time around the world are trying to grasp the essence of that immortal beginning. They understand the soul as an intangible substance, and some scholars have tried to prove its existence by looking for changes in the body mass of a dead person. In 1901 physician MacDougall M. did

experiment in nursing homes with dying people who were sick and weight them before and after death. It states that the soul weighs 21 grams unlike dogs who did not lost weight after death. After his experiment was published in 1907, physician Clarke A. criticized MacDougall in *American Medicine* (May issue) and stated that there is a rapid rise in body temperature at the moment of death because the lungs are no longer cooling blood, causing an increase in sweating, which could easily account for MacDougall's missing 21 grammes. However, on MacDougall's discovery, movies, songs, and documentaries have been based.

Spirit photography started back in the late 19th century. William Mumler and William Hope started "ghost hunting" by taking photos of people with their ostensible dead family members. American background spirit photographer William H. Mumler (1832–1884) first spirit photograph occurred by accident. In the self-portrait we see the "spirit" of his cousin. His best-known photograph shows an elderly lady, Mary Todd Lincoln, with the "spirit" of her dead husband standing behind her (Figure 7). Initially, he claimed the image was made around 1869, but later, in a letter to the Boston Record, confirmed that it was taken in 1872. This contradiction only adds to the disputed nature of his work.



Figure 7 (Mumler, 1872)

The invisible fields surrounding the bodies can be seen by the electrography device. It opens the gate to an unknown mysterious world. Its producer, Konstantin Korotkov from St. Petersburg, claims to have gathered unmistakable evidence of the soul's existence. K. Korotkov photographed the aura of the dying people and proved that the glow, gradually fading, continues for some time after death. This proves that the energy shell lives longer than the body. The device he developed captured the sudden ascending and then falling energy curve of the dead person. According to K. Korotkov, such a jump is treated as an attempt by the soul to return to the body. According to K. Korotkov, when a person dies naturally, the soul leaves the body calm. If life ceases abruptly, the soul fails to quickly realize that the body is already dead. Therefore, her attempt to return to the body is still observed for some time until the realization that physical life is finally over.



Figure 8 (Roer, 2008)

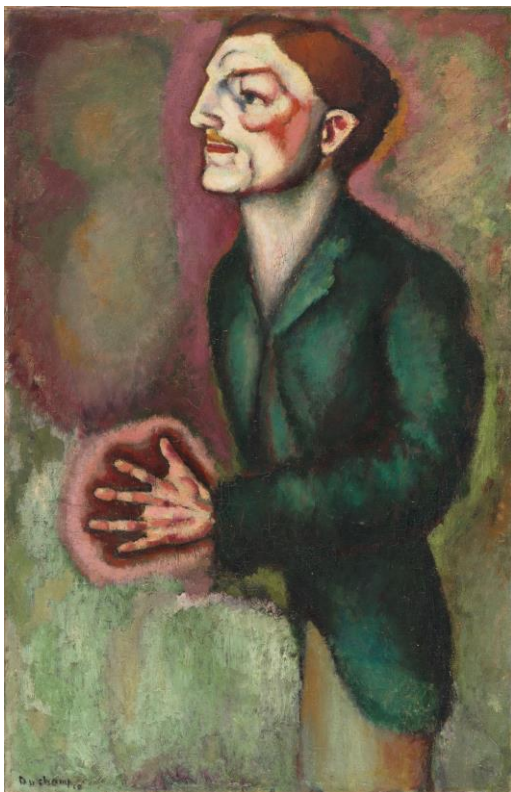


Figure 9 (Duchamp, 1910)

“Everything that’s not real is stripped away. You're the most real you’ll ever be, more than you’ve ever been before.” (Schels, 2014)



Figure 10 (Schels, 2005)

Photographer Walter Schels faced his fear of death and created powerful series of portraits of people before and directly after their death. Every portrait tells the story about the person who died, and it is undeniable testimony about their existence and end. Schels work of exploring death has a link to memento mori photography that was popular in Victorian England. The Victorian era was filled with death, therefore by the mid-nineteenth century, photography had become more commonplace and affordable, resulting in memento mori photographic portraiture. During the Victorian time, death was a regular visitor, and people began preparing for it when they were young. Dying was a subject that was discussed openly and often. It also reminds me the traditions in Lithuania. People started to prepare for their own funeral young

enough. They bought or sew their clothes for the day they will die. Moreover, they talked where and how they want to be buried, it was open and common theme when I was a child. The female who never been married was buried dressed as a bride- all in white and with veil.

The Latin translation of the word *memento mori* is "remember you must die." It is a metaphysical concept that acts as a reminder of our transience on Earth and a message to prepare for whatever awaits us in the next dimension.



Figure 11 (Victorian era)



Figure 12

CHAPTER 3

Reason



Figure 13 (Gardner, 1865)

When the phenomenon of photography began to be discovered at the beginning of the 19th century, the conditions for the first discussions about its character and purpose were created.

This part of the article will present the position of the French author Roland Barthes (1915-1980), extensively discussed in his book *Camera Lucida*, published just before his death. The author of the book was encouraged to think about photography by a photograph of Napoleon Bonaparte's youngest brother Jerome (1852), which he looked at and realized he was looking at photograph with an amazement: "I am looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor." (Barthes, 1980, p. 3). Roland Barthes is a theoretician, critic, philosopher and semiotician of French literature, a creator who has dedicated many of his articles and ideas to photography and, of course, its relationship to philosophy. The essence and main goal of his works was to prove that the photographic image, more precisely, photography, is able not only to perfectly represent the world around us, but also to reveal the meanings inherent in it. Compared to history, photography is indeed a completely new derivative, a technology that allows us to say with absolute certainty that this object, a person, or an event - in fact, was "here-and-now" (Barthes, 1980, p. 84) for the observing subject, without any intermediaries. Taking a photo means not only capturing a moment, a certain image in it, but it is equivalent to scattering that image into infinity, freezing it in time. It becomes possible not only to evaluate the subject's past and present but after a while looking at it, to insert it into the frames of the future. The author of the book is very interestingly formulated the question, not "what is photography?", but "What does my body know of Photography?" (Barthes, 1980, p. 9). Another important detail is that the book was written after the author's mother's

death and before his death, therefore death is one of the most important topics related to photography in this book. According to Barthes, the moment the trigger is pressed, the subject becomes an object in its presence. Part of a second and you're already placed in an image museum, looking at yourself as the Other. After a while, others look at you in the picture, and, most horrible, they look at the resurrected dead. However, in none of Barthes works we would not find the desire to know what the essence of photography is. The search for the essence of photography is painful for Barthes because he began to search for it after his mother's death. Unable to remember her, he searched for a photo of his mother as she really was: "looking for the truth of the face I had loved" (Barthes, 1980, p. 67), but in none of the photos did the image live up to his expectations until he finally discovered a photo of his mother's childhood, which reflected her true personality: "rediscovered my mother" (Barthes, 1980, p. 69). In a natural, unplayed childhood.

Without denying the importance of photography as a technology for capturing thought and action, it is worth noting that this phenomenon is losing its artistic value with the rapid growth of its output. It should not be forgotten that photography in itself is not just another art form; it is a hybrid capable of influencing not only the individual but also the cultural consciousness itself. Quality can be preserved without succumbing to the visual flow and by selecting just a few units of photographs that are inherently significant to the observer due to the emotional ties that connect him and the captured details.

CONCLUSION

From the very first moment a person appears in front of the lens, he begins to pose. By posing, a person creates a new body for himself. A body that ceases to be his that begins to move differently, that becomes unfamiliar. Creating a new body by posing this man at the same time creates a new image that appears before the one captured in photography. When confronted with a lens, a person, a subject, becomes the Other - not a photographer, not a spectator, but himself. It can be said that in photography, the subject is turned into an object, an object exhibited in a museum. Afterwards, the question arises, is it possible to perceive oneself as the Other by looking at one's self-portrait? It can be argued that in this confrontation, a person ceases to be both a subject and an object and becomes a subject that feels like an object. According to Barthes, a person who finds himself in this transformation experiences a micro version of his death. After seeing himself in the photograph, the subject sees what can be called an aggregate image. He sees a personalized death that, of course, fails to see by ordinary observers, Others. For them, this photo and the subject in it become the simplest object.

“What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially.”
(Barthes, 1980)

To be and to be visible are different things to me. Photography is one of many ways to prove our existence using both art and documentary photography. Barthes's attempt to find a "true" image of his mother after she died, deeply touched me. The main goal and foremost question to me: what is the subject matter? Moreover, create a punctum that will aloud to "see" the image after it is no longer in front of us and moving the viewer profoundly and emotionally.

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