Photography and the Face; The Quest to Capture the Contained

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Abstract

This PhD by practice sets out to reformulate the meeting between photographer and subject, from one that is commonly constructed as a power relationship to an *empathic* meeting between subjectivities. It is an attempt to re-engage with the original promise of photography –that of connecting with the 'soul' of the other. I take a phenomenological perspective, applying recent research in the field of neuroscience and psychology to throw new light on processes at play, both when we view photographically reproduced human faces and when we come face to face with others in the meeting preceding photographic portraits. My original contribution to knowledge consists of beginning to construct a theory as to why certain photographic portraits invoke an embodied reaction, whilst others leave us cold. What is it that makes us look again and again at particular photographic portraits? I propose that emotional contagion is an important factor both when making and viewing photograpic portraiture. It was not within the scope of this thesis by practice to explore this proposition, but it is an area suitable for further research.

I use the practice as a testing ground, letting each new step develop out of my reflections on the previous work, using a qualitative methodology. I approach the *face-to-face* meeting through the writing of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and phenomenology, and make a series of experimentations, letting the practice twist and turn upon itself. I strip away and interchange the components of the photographic portrait one by one, project by project, letting my practice respond experimentally to both the theoretical research and the situation in which it is conceived. I move from still to moving and back again, through performance, text and sound, in an attempt to find that elusive embodied connection between subject matter and audience.

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Preface – A Practice Between Myself and Others

Right from the beginning, my engagement with photography was an extension of my interest in the faces that surrounded me. As a child I drew friends and family, but never quite managed to do them justice. After high school, I bought a camera in a flea market and a few weeks later got to try out as a photographer's assistant. The shoot in question was a portrait during a press-event, and the photographer asked me to please help make the subject feel comfortable so he would get a good shot. Something in that meeting suited me, made my natural shyness abate. I got the job, and started working with photography.

After graduating from my BA-course in photography, I started working as a photographer, combining editorial portrait commissions with self-instigated documentary portraiture projects. I photographed actors, musicians, politicians, members of different subcultures and plenty of others who for one reason or another were deemed interesting for the public at that particular moment in time. But being one of a line of portrait photographers during press junkets did not suit me, and navigating the contrasting demands of picture editors and PR representatives made the meetings feel predefined, empty and flat. I started focussing on my own, personal work, influenced by photographers like Diane Arbus and Nan Goldin. I believed, inspired by their works and lives, that I needed to immerse myself in the environment of the people I wanted to depict, that I needed to become their friend, their confidante. I sought, like Arbus, to capture those moments when the mask slips, when people reveal something they don't want to. I fell prey to the idea that, if people don't want to reveal something, it must by virtue of this say more about them, and be more *true*. More interesting.

But working in this vein came to a dead end. I discovered I am not interested in catching people out – revealing something they themselves do not want to be seen. Ethically, I could not justify

it as a working method, regardless of the level of success the end result might garner. Instead, I reformulated my approach to the genre, and posited that I wanted to capture precisely *the masks* people wear while inhabiting public space, the faces people *choose* to present. Thinking the mask is all you got, I embraced a postmodern perspective, seeing people as "made by soft plastic, moulded by social circumstance."[1] It is at this point that this research project begins. I set out in this PhD to investigate the unequal power relationship between photographer and subject, and how it affects the resulting image.[2] But, through an engagement with the prose poems of Charles Baudelaire and my own writings, I felt the need to reformulate what I do yet again. It is not portraits that make a power relationship manifest that interest me. Not roles played nor masks worn in public. Rather, it is the moments when one manages, despite roles and masks, despite rules governing one's behaviour in public, to feel the boundaries between self and other dissolve. When we, suddenly, become unsure of the demarcation line between inside and outside, what is *seen* and what is *felt.*

A portrait of an inmate of Tuol Sleng prison, Cambodia. Of a slave at a 19th-century plantation. The work of August Sander. Of Rineke Djikstra. The Scottish family portrayed by Thomas Struth. I return again and again, and I never tire of meeting the eyes of the depicted persons. What is it that happens in me when I encounter these images? And how can I similarly move my audience through another's subjectivity? Rather than effecting a close reading of these works, which has been done many times before by others,[3] I turn my gaze outwards to find answers. I will look towards neuroscience and psychology, attempting to draw out the dynamics in the dyadic meeting between photographer and subject, artwork and viewer.

In the first practice project, *Returns*, I encounter white middle-aged men on the train platforms of Paris Les Halles station as they are travelling home from work, setting up a large-format camera as a temporary stage within the public space. In the next work, *A Place to Call Home*,

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1. Kenneth Gergen, "The healthy, happy human being wears many masks" in *The Fontana Postmodernism Reader* ed. Walter Truett Anderson, *(*London: Fontana Press 1995), 138.

2. See Tagg 1993, 2009 and Sekula 1986 for discussions on the processes and power relations at play, when to be portrayed shifted from being a sign of power and prestige, to demanding subjection and submissivness, and photography became intrinsically linked with surveillance, recordkeeping, evidence and truth.

3. See Sobieszek 1999; Fried 2008; Dugan 2014.

created during a residency in Israel, I continue creating work through encounters with strangers inhabiting public space. This time my subjects are more democratic, as I attempt to investigate their role in Israeli society. Are they heroes? Victims? Or even perpetrators? I create a series of portraits, but also make a film based on my written notes from these encounters.

Writing moments I would have liked to photograph, but was unable to, becomes a process of defining precisely *when* the urge to create arises. As James Joyce's epiphanies or Charles Baudelaire's prose poems sought to do, I record small, ephemeral perceptions of real life that seem to take on heightened significance, standing out from the mass of experiences of our everyday lives. I attempt to rework one such moment into a short video loop, *Breathing Space*, where the laboured breathing of a tuba player through his instrument evokes my own bodily struggles with asthma. Next, I invite a group of people into the studio to explore what happens if I remove the lens mediating the encounter, instead letting the audience meet the subjects face to face in the performance *Det Ordnar Sig Nog*.

Finally, in *Merciful, Wonderful*, I let the video work culminate in the frame being filled for a duration of time by an older man's face, reaching out towards the audience with his humanity.

Interweaving theory and practice, reflection, writing and making, I explore what happens when we connect with others in face-to-face meetings, and how this linking of subjectivities can be carried across to the meeting between artwork and audience. The text is punctured by personal reflections and journal excerpts in italics.

> *I want to express something of my difficulties here, right from the start. It's no coincidence I became a photographer. For as long as I can remember, I have observed and reflected on the world around me. First through drawing, then the camera. But whatever I made remained for me only, and I carefully hid away all my sketchbooks in drawers. When I applied to my first art college, I couldn't bear the idea of attending an interview, instead sending off an envelope full of slides. I was accepted, and spent all summer in my bathroom-darkroom nervously trying to prepare the portfolio I had been instructed to bring on the first day of the course. When I arrived, I was petrified. I stepped into a room full of people surrounding*

tables carrying portfolios. I placed mine in a corner, and then promptly moved to the other end of the room; I wanted no one to connect me with my set of photographs, portraits, in the black cardboard box, even though I knew that the images were not worthless, and some even good. After some time, I got more used to sharing my work, even though the process remained painful. Perhaps I need to articulate some of the anguish accompanying this process of turning the focus onto myself and my work that a PhD by practice entails. To refrain from refracting the attention towards another, and fight the strong desire to remain private, secretive, ensconced in my own world. Behind my camera, invisible.

I am watching a documentary on Vivian Maier, a French–American nanny who, when defaulting on payments for her storage lockers in old age, was discovered to be not only a prolific but also a talented photographer. As her work has become exhibited and sold, writers and critics keep coming back to the enigma – but why did she choose not to show anyone? Why did she work as a nanny? Well-known photographer Joel Meyerowitz said that she seemed to lack a certain something in her character that would make her want to defend herself as an artist to the outside world.[4] Perhaps I too lack that certain something. It does not come naturally to me, this proclaiming about my position, about that of my artworks. It has nothing to do with thinking, making, or even writing. Instead, it is rooted in a deep impulse to remain hidden. But, in the pages that unfold I will force myself out of the shadows. Try not to feel blinded by the searing light in this central space, but to remain functioning, reflecting and expressing throughout. And I imagine you, dear audience, wishing me luck in my endeavour.

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4. Finding Vivian Maier, directed by John Maloof and Charlie Siskel (2013; Chicago, IFC Films), DVD.

1. Introduction, or The Quest to Capture the Contained

When he was ordered to sit for a portrait, the 3ʳᵈ-century philosopher Plotinus said, "Is it not enough to carry about this image in which nature has enclosed us? Do you really think I must also consent to leave, as a desirable spectacle to posterity, an image of an image?"[5] I am interested in the human face as the surface through which we attempt to make sense of other humans. This PhD explores the dynamics involved in the meeting between artist and subject, with particular focus on face-to-face interaction. Building on both my artistic practice and on current research, I discuss the forces at work in the meeting between photographer and subject, through the presentation of an original body of work and this thesis. I map out the relationship between portraiture and empathy, both in the relationship between photographer and subject, and between the photographically reproduced human face and the viewer.

My aim is to reformulate the meeting between photographer and subject, from one that is commonly constructed as a power relationship[6] to one viewed as an *empathic meeting* between subjectivities. I use recent findings in the field of neuroscience to throw new light on the processes at play, both when we view photographically reproduced human faces and when we come face to face with others in the taking of the photographs.

During the last decade a significant number of publications and exhibitions on photography, in Britain and elsewhere, have taken *The Face* as their theme. The majority have focused on the photographic print's ability/inability to comment on the character or psychological state of the individual depicted. The nature of the photographic portrait as an intersubjective construct has been neglected in favour of conceptual approaches, like the rigid procedures of artists such as Thomas Ruff, Bettina von Zwehli or Marjaana Kella. These artists have all been influenced by the postmodern distrust of a fixed identity, there to be photographed and uncovered by the artist. Rather than attempting to depict anything pertaining to personality

or interior life, they set up rigidly defined rules (for instance, photographing subjects listening

5. St Jerome, 'Letters 54', quoted in Robert Sobieszek, *Ghost in the Shell, Photography and the Human Soul 1850-2000 (*LA and Cambridge: Los Angeles County Museum of Arts, 1999), 16.

6. See page 9, and Brilliant 1991, Clarke 1992, Bolton, 1989, Durden et al 2001 for discussions about the power relationship between subject and photographer during the making of photographic portraits.

to classical music in the dark, suddenly interrupted by a flash; people under hypnosis; or people lit with flat lighting and whose countenances are totally devoid of expression). No major study has explored the interpersonal empathic meeting preceding the photographic portrait. My research will therefore add a new, necessary perspective to the contemporary debate regarding photographic portraiture. But this project is not a throwback to ideas that the photograph demonstrates "artistic originality through consolidating the self of the portrayed".[7] Rather, it is an attempt to argue against those who decry the bankruptcy of portraiture, and, instead, reinvest it with the possibility of achieving a deep connection with the other.

The main task of the photographer has often been formulated in terms of preventing the sitter from acting in front of the camera. Richard Brilliant claims, in accordance with Plotinus, that a portrait "challenges the transience or irrelevancy of human existence and the portrait artist must respond to the demands formulated by the individual's wish to endure."[8] This PhD, however, will not address questions relating to authenticity and staging. Instead, I will use phenomenology as a theoretical framework in which to reframe the photographer–sitter meeting, and recent advances within empathy research, to throw new light on the dynamics present.

The methods used within the practice of making and writing are empirically driven, but the research comes into being in reference to existing bodies of knowledge in diverse fields. Theory and practice have informed each other, creating a synaesthesia between making and reading, thinking and writing, where the practice can be read as a series of propositions on how one can engender an empathic connection to the other. My method draws from phenomenology, psychology and neuroscience and in particular the emerging field of neuroaesthetics.

The nature of *empathy, emotional contagion* and *embodied interaction* is slippery. My method is therefore necessarily fragmented, convoluted and difficult to pin down on a single concise track. This is reflected in the structure of this thesis, which moves from page to page, perspective to perspective, in a looping movement, returning again and again to the portrait through the refracted lens of my readings, making and thinking *through* portraiture. Thinking through

7. Benedict Burbridge, "Exacting Photography: Self-Imaging and Its Frustration in Contemporary Art Photography, *Re.bus*, no. 5 (summer 2010), 2.
8. Richard Brilliant *Portraiture* (London: Reaktion Books, 1991), 14.

making engenders a different form of knowledge from the practice of reading and looking at finished artworks. Therefore, theory and practice underpin each other like a latticework, where each strand is equally necessary for arriving at an understanding of photographic portraiture.

I will give a background to photographic portraiture and the different dynamics at play in the meeting preceding the photographic portrait. Second, I will describe my attempts at recording moments of embodied connection through writing and practice. Third, and most importantly, I will look at recent empathy research within neuroscience, neuroaesthetics and psychology. Fourth, I will draw out the relationship between research and practice, and challenge the thinking around both. Interspersed within the text, descriptions of my encounters with artworks appear as I attempt to define moments of connectivity.

2. Framing Photographic Portraiture

When discussing portrait photography, it is useful to look at the influence ideas about physiognomy have had on thoughts on the face. Physiognomy is the so-called *science* of reading character from the facial traits, the size and shape of the features and the form and proportion of the skull. It is concerned with permanent traits rather than shifting expressions – an excess of expression was thought to erase the physiognomy.[9]

Faces are arguably the most viewed item of our lives,[10] and the idea of the face as a reflection of the soul has existed since antiquity. St Jerome, in the 5th century, writes, "the face is the mirror of the mind, and eyes without speaking confess the secrets of the heart".[11] The modern form of physiognomy was founded by Johann Caspar Lavater, a Swiss scientist and priest, who, in 1778, published *Physiognomishe Fragmente*. Here, he outlined how to interpret and judge facial traits in the search for the character and moral state of the subject. With the advent of photography, physiognomy acquired the perfect tool to aid the reading of a face in the portrait photograph.[12] People were also inclined to believe, through the camera's ability to make the familiar strange, that the photographic portrait inherently contained the truth of the character of the sitter.[13] Photography became a way for people to gain access to what they saw as their real, true appearance. It is important to bear in mind that in the early days of photography mirrors were not so widespread as they were to become in the 20th century.[14]

Mental patients and criminals were two of the groups that would be extensively photographed and analysed by scientists with physiognomic pretensions.[15] However, physiognomic theories spread outside of this scientific realm to influence both studio photographers and artists who

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9. Stephen Bann, "Erased Physiognomy: Téeodore Géricault, Paul Strand and Garry Winogrand" in ed. Graham Clarke, *The Portrait in Photography,* (London: Reaktion Books ,1992), 43.
10. See for instance, Adophs and Janowski, p. 253.
11. St Jerome, quoted in Robert Sobieszek, *Ghost in the Shell, Photography and the Human Soul 1850-2000,* (LA and Cambridge: Los Angeles County Museum of Arts, 1999), 16.
12. Graham Clarke, *The Portrait in Photography,* (London: Reaktion Books ,1992), 14.
13. Mette Mortensen, "Photography in the Public Arena" in *Geometry of the Face*, exhibition catalogue. (Copenhagen, Denmark: The National Museum of Photography, The Royal Library, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2003), 22.
14. Ibid., 22.
15.   Suzanne Regener, "Reading Faces – Photography and the Search for Expression" in *Geometry of the Face*, exh. cat. (Copenhagen, Denmark: The National Museum of Photography, The Royal Library, 2003), 43.

were aiming to capture the "unique, characteristic expression that provides a link between the internal and the external".[16] James F. Ryder claimed that his camera could "read and prove character in a man's face at sight. To his (the camera's) eye a rouge was a rouge; the honest man, when found, was recognized and properly estimated".[17] These ideas and beliefs continued to influence photographic practitioners in the first half of the 20th century. August Sander, for example, although more interested in using people as representatives of a type or a profession than he was in his sitters as individuals, thought that photography had the ability to "create pictures that reproduce the people concerned with unconditional veracity and reflect their whole psychology".[18] Edward Weston continued this argument in the 1940s, claiming that the main role of photographers is to "*reveal* the individual before his camera, to transfer the living quality of that individual to his finished print."[19] Hence, for Weston and Sander, a portrait, regardless of media, needed to express the personality or *truth* of the sitter, and could only be judged by its ability to do so, rather than from aesthetic considerations.

The influence of physiognomy is still felt today.[20] One reason that these ideas remain popular might be that we do derive some accurate idea of a person's personality from facial expressions, if not from the static features. Expressions reflect our state of mind, and are changeable. Our static features, in contrast, are not malleable. An example that comes to mind is that of two portraits a friend sent me. They both depict the same man, but one of the images is from Thomas Ruff's famous *Portraits* series. Devoid of expression, the face that looks out at me resembles a mask, and, as I meet the gaze of the depicted man, I am left cold. I feel nothing but a detached curiosity. Thomas Ruff has said that he wanted to remind the viewer that they are not meeting a real person but a photograph.[21] In the next image the man's countenance fills the frame, and he

looks at me with eyes that seem to communicate something. The skin around his eyes is slightly crinkled, he tilts his head upwards and juts out his chin. The beginnings of a smile seem to be playing around the corners of his mouth. I look at his somewhat deformed nose, his battered skin, and I imagine a life for him. Yes, perhaps I don't differentiate so much between meeting him in real life and meeting him here, on the page .

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16. Ibid., 47.
17. Sobiezseck, 63.
18. August Sander, *Menchen des 20 Jahrhunderts,* quoted in Regener, 52.
19. Mick Gidley, *Hoppé's Impure Portraits,* in Clarke, 137.
20. Recent titles include *Physiognomy, the Art of Reading Faces* by J. Lefas, *Face Language* by R. L. Whiteside, and *Face Reading, the Art of Chinese Physiognomy* by T. T. Mar.
21. Gill Blank, and Thomas Ruff, "Gil Blank and Thomas Ruff in Conversation." Influence, no. 2 (2004), 52.

Fig I
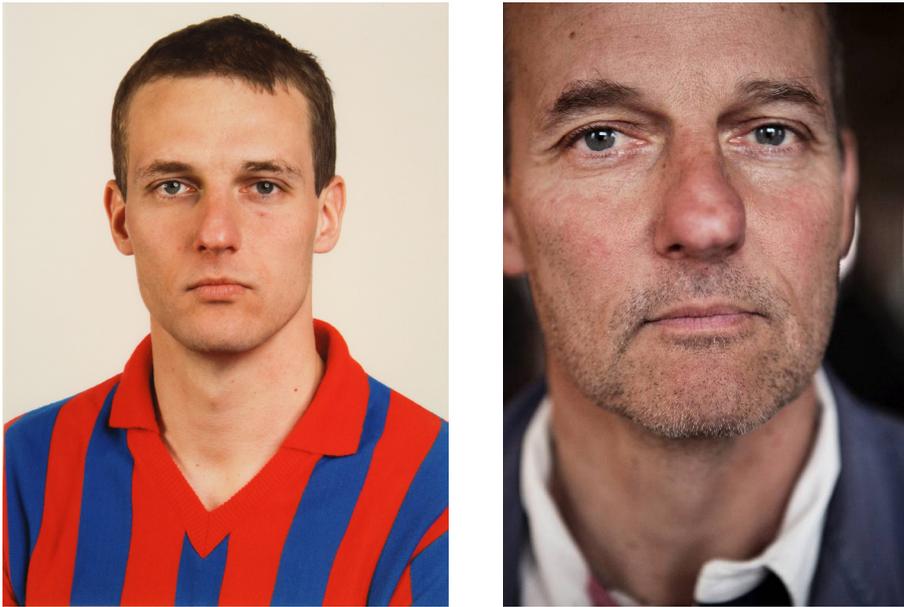
Similarly, a popular idea today is that our appearance is how we define who we are. Portrait photography reinforces this assumed connection between identity and appearance, the connection that we all use to guide us around the public arena. Even if we really know better, it is very difficult for us not to judge people we meet on their appearance. We are acutely aware that we are being judged on our exteriors, as the increasing popularity of plastic surgery can testify.[22]

In recent contemporary art, the idea of consolidating the self of the sitter through the skill of the artist/photographer has gone thoroughly out of fashion. At a scientific and artistic level these ideas became intrinsically linked with prevalent ideologies of racial superiority in the 1930s and thus became thoroughly discredited after the Second World War.[23] An example of the current view within contemporary photography on physiognomy and portraiture is found in the foreword 0of the catalogue, *About Face*, from an exhibition at the Hayward Gallery. The term 'portrait photographer' is eschewed in favour of the term 'face photographer' as a way to disassociate from the "historical baggage"[24] carried by the term portraiture. The catalogue outlines two of

Fig I   Left : Thomas Ruff. *Porträt (J. Röing)*. 1988.
             Right: *Johan Röing,* private image

22.   Cooter, Amy. "UK Cosmetic Surgery Statistics 2013: Which Are the Most Popular," February 3, 2014. http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2014/feb/03/uk-plastic-surgery-2013-most-popular.
23.   Regener, 52.
24. William A. Ewing, "The Faces In the Mirror" in *About Face, Photography and the Death of the Portrait*, exhibition catalouge, (London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2004), 6.

the primary issues uniting participating artists: the rejection of the idea that a portrait can make visible the character or personality of the subject and a refusal to believe that a photograph can capture the "likeness"[25] of a face in all its transmutations.

While I don't believe that a photograph can capture the 'soul' of the subject, I do not agree with this complete rejection of the significance of the face in our understanding of the other through an image. The face *does* hold a special place for humans.[26] Even if the camera is only capable of capturing one of the infinite numbers of transmutations our faces are capable of, this one image will communicate something very different in level and extent from what a photograph of another body part would be able to achieve. I believe the face is qualitatively and quantitatively more effective in communication than other body parts. By virtue of this it must be allowed a special place.

As well as reasons intrinsic to the properties of the face, photographic representations of faces are particularly significant because they take place within a history of artistic representations of faces, a discourse of facial images in drawing, painting, sculpture and photography. The practice of creating and looking at representations of faces is in itself an act that gives meaning. [27]

> *I think back to my own compulsion to photograph the faces of others. How does that fit into a desire to remain hidden? Does it reflect a feeling of alienation, where that which is meant to be close and familiar to the small child always felt worryingly strange. As if one did not belong there. Can one find a sense of belonging in the faces of others, instead? Or is it simply a mutual recognition of something, each other, as fellow humans? (But it can also happen with animals – so I would say a recognition of another lived life is more correct.) Is there a kind of solace to be found in those quick meetings between strangers – those mutual looks? A solace unsullied by misunderstandings, accusations or misinterpretations? Quickly walking away, but with the photograph as proof.*

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25. Ewing, 9.
26. See Ewing, and his claim that "the face is part of the body, <u>not</u> of a higher order, <u>not</u> sacred where the body is profane," 10.

It did happen, that moment of connection. I cannot possibly know what drove Vivian

Maier to roam the streets with her camera.

But looking at her work I wonder if she too did not find solace in the faces of strangers.

2.1 On the Face

Despite the change in trends in thoughts on the face today compared to the 19th century, the face is still the primary site where investigations into our identities and emotions, desires and character take place. We perceive expression and individuality even in the most clumsily drawn sketch of a face.[28] The face is the principal tool of communication between humans, a "membrane of encounter"[29] of the self, the other and the world. In order to further my understanding of the relationship between photographer and subject, I will be looking at some differing thoughts regarding the meeting between faces, thus examining what a face is, and what it emanates.

Attitudes to the face have unsurprisingly followed shifts in critical theory and philosophy, with more recent critics doubting the existence of a locatable truth within it. Instead, they have indulged deconstructionist theories with ideas of play and slippage of what the face *means.* Thoughts can be divided into two main schools, the first believing the face to be "a fluid matrix of constantly shifting identities at once true and false, assumed and genuine, feigned and imagined."[30] In this context the face is regarded as an "organ-carrying plate of nerves"[31], constantly moving, expressing miniscule muscular movements that the rest of the body normally conceals. It is a site of struggle between what we are feeling and what we would like those around us to see. The novelist Kobo Abe suggests that the expression of the face acts like a "roadmap between oneself and others."[32]

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28. Ernst H. Gombrich, *The Image and the Eye: Further Studies in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation.* (Oxford: Phaidon Press Ltd, 1986), 115.

29. Anne Krauter, "Pictures Many – Original (N)one? Aspects of the Portrait Today", in ed. Peter Pakesch, *Abbild: Recent Portraiture and Depiction*, (New York: Springer, 2001) 17.

30. Sobiezseck, 86.

31. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 1986), 88.

32. Kobo Abe, *The Face of Another*, (New York: Vintage, 2003), 27.

There is a duality in that the face can only show as much as it hides, and hide as much as it shows. Emmanuel Levinas, on the other hand, writes about the meeting of two faces as a site of nakedness, defencelessness. The other, when facing, exposes what is "most naked, most vulnerable."[33] This facing the other can also make demands. His presence makes a summons, requesting a response. The other is demanding a reproduction of his postures and gestures, "ordering my body with his."[34]

> *I think about the portrait of a woman and a baby from the Cambodian Tuol Sleng genocide museum. The pair were photographed as they were brought into the notorious Khmer Rouge prison that only seven people are known to have survived. The photographer, sent by the regime to China as a young teenager to learn the photographic craft, formed part of the prison guard. He knew that if he were to make one or two mistakes, he, too, would be executed. Did this mean he felt empathy for the woman sitting in front of the camera? Or had he become numb to the suffering all around? We cannot know anything about his feelings, yet, when I look at the woman's face, something happens in me. I believe I can feel her sadness, her resignation to her fate and the fate of the young baby in her arms. I wish I could help her, wish I could at least entertain hope that she and the baby survived. I feel as if they speak to me through the portrait. Requesting a response in me, as Levinas has described the face-to-face meeting. Does it matter that we cannot know if the photographer felt empathy or not?*

As Alphonso Lingis puts it in his response to Levinas's thoughts:

> The I arises wholly in response to the other. It is with oneself that one is summoned to respond … One begins by consenting to talk, just to pass the time – talk is cheap – and little by little one finds that one has given everything away. [35]

Here, Lingis summarizes the dynamics also occurring in the meeting between photographer and photographed, and the perils inherent in such an interchange. Despite this sense of risk there is a purity in how Levinas views the encounter. Rather than looking at skin as a covering he sees it as a zone of exposure, where our vulnerability is made manifest.

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33. E Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, (Springer Science & Business Media1979), 127.
34. Alphonso Lingis, *Deathbound Subjectivity* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ Pr, 1989), 144.
35. Ibid., 146.

This enables us to look beyond socially allocated identities and uniforms.[36]

In disagreement with the aforementioned school, the second school of thought sees the face as a "blank somatic surface expressive of absolutely nothing yet infinitely suggestive."[37] Gilles Deleuze and Feliz Guattari claim that the face cannot be defined as a type of "envelope exterior"[38] to the person. Rather, it is an intersection between significance and subjectification: a white wall where signs can play, with black holes where consciousness and passion are hiding. The face, then, is a screen that meaning can reflect off, fluid in construction and constantly changing.[39] Faces are put on and altered in accordance with the role to be played. "You don't so much have a face as slide into one."[40] You are judged on the face you produce, always at risk of being rejected if your face is different, or seems suspect. The faces of the protagonists in various power relationships will conform to the social conventions in place rather than taking on their own individuality. This contrasts with Levinas's idea of the face as something that can transplant us away from the role and predetermined exchange. I believe that, even if meetings have a tendency to follow social conventions, there is nonetheless a space where the humanity of the other can and will slip through.

In a clip from Hungarian director Béla Tarr's film Werckmeister Harmonies*, a mob of men armed with wooden sticks can be seen entering a hospital, moving systematically from room to room in a silent choreography, turning the sick out of their beds, hitting and kicking them, destroying furniture and emptying cupboards. The only sound to be heard is shoes against floor, and the muffled sounds of bodies being beaten and furniture turned over. The victims as well as the perpetrators are eerily silent. A Steadicam camera floats behind the running men, tracking their progress through the building. After five minutes of steady progression through the building, the two lead characters walk through a room being destroyed, and at the end of it pull down a white curtain covering a doorway leading into the next space. They suddenly stop on the threshold, looking.*

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36. Levinas, 132.
37. Sobieszek, 86.
38. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Translated by Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 168.
39. Ibid., 115.
40. Ibid., 176.

The camera floats in-between them and also come to a stop, and we get to see what they see – an unbearably old and fragile-looking man standing naked on spindly legs in a dilapidated bathtub. His head hangs, shoulders are hunched and arms and legs look as if they would snap in an instant. The camera – and the men – stand still for a moment as music can be heard on the soundtrack, then turn their backs and start walking away. From room after room along the long central corridor, the other members of the mob file wordlessly out behind their leaders. Violence, when faced with the fragile humanity of the old man, is impossible. He reminds us of where we will all end up, and where we all started – as vulnerable helpless creatures dependent on the good intentions of others.[41]

Giorgio Agamben defines the face as "the very opening in which humans hide and stay hidden."[42] It shows all the characteristics of a person, without those attributes managing to tell us anything about who that being is. For Agamben, what the face reveals is just the possibility of communication. It doesn't communicate anything in itself, nor does it express any aspect of us. He calls the face "*only* opening, *only* communicability"[43]. Rather than being what could have revealed who we are to our surroundings, our appearance turns into something we cannot recognize. It is therefore betraying us, and the idea we have of who we are. "We are all prisoners, trapped by our own face."[44] This clashes with our desire to take control over our appearance and our "being manifest"[45]. The difference between humans and animals is that the latter have no interest in this taking of control; they are simply living in their skin without caring about it. Hence animals are incapable of acting.[46] According to Agamben, this is also the reason why animals are not interested in mirrors, or, as he puts it, "the image of an image"[47]. His thoughts on the face seem to touch on what I am interested in doing within my work – not expressing or defining a person's characteristics or 'soul' through photography – *capturing the contained* – but rather depicting the meeting – the intersubjective communicability that can happen when two creatures stand face to face. This brings to mind Maurice Merleau-Ponty:

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41. *Werckmeister Harmonies* directed by Tarr, Bela and Agnes Hranitzky, (Artificial Eye, 2009), DVD.
42. Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, Translated by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 90.
43. Ibid., 92
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., 90.
47. Ibid., 92.

Sympathy does not presuppose a genuine distinction between self-consciousness and consciousness of the other but rather the absence of a distinction between the self and the other. It is the simple fact that I live in the facial expressions of the other, as I feel him living in mine. [48]

We, in this sense, *embody* communication.

In conclusion then, ideas of what the face is are contradictory. They range from a conviction that that which emanates from the face is a complex combination of truth and falsehood, to a belief that our faces are in no way connected with our interiority, our soul, but are simply a site of reflection and convention. The skin is variously seen as a site of exposure, or as a screen only capable of mirroring. The next section will continue the exploration of faces, but this time through the practice.

2.2 Practice I, Returns

20 Framed C-Type prints, 127 x 101 cm. Installed together at eye height, the life-sized portraits recreates the space of the train platforms, and the viewer finds herself in the midst of the crowd.

Fig II

Fig II   Installation view from exhibition"Photography Now" Wright State Gallery, Ohio, USA, 2007

48. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception: An Introduction*. 2 edition. (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 146.

Returns is a photographic series that arises out of the emptiness and solitude of modern urban life, a world of accumulated blank hours, institutional anonymity, boredom, and impotence. The series are made up of portraits of men waiting for the train to arrive, encountered on the platforms of a central commuter station. I created the images in the evening, when the residues of the day still linger on the men's faces. The title of the work, *Returns*, alludes to the mental and spatial state of the subjects, as they inhabit a halfway point between home and work.

The men are of different ages and social classes, but are united by gender and race, and by the fact that they all are middle-aged. This demographic group is the most powerful in our society, but the men portrayed seem imprisoned in their roles, weighed down by their responsibilities and more than a little tired and weary. The work reflects on the position of modern man, trapped within the normative conventions of society, at the same time as it expresses the sensation of strangeness one can feel before a world that lives up to one's aspirations less and less.

Are the men's faces arranged to fit into the role they ought to play, as Deleuze and Guattari suggested in the previous chapter? I don't think so, and in this work I tried to show that even within narrowly defined norms subjectivity can and will escape, precisely through the face. We may slide into a character, cut our hair, buy the clothes expected of us. But the face will transplant us away from the role and predetermined exchange and become a space where subjectivity will emerge. Furthermore, photography, as opposed to the face-to-face meeting, can help us see through constructions of power, as it enables us to behold the face of another for an extended period of time. The photographs in the *Returns* series enable us to see beyond the socially allocated roles; at the same time, the process of creating the portraits gave the men a stage, as it were, on which to express their subjectivity.

All the images in the series were photographed in the evening on the platform of the RER commuter trains in Paris Les Halles station, one of the busiest train stations in Europe, and the central hub of the Paris transport system. I approached middle-aged men with a camera as they stood waiting for their trains on the edge of the platform. The meetings were very quick, often lasting only a few minutes. I approached them with a large-format field camera mounted on a tripod, and as soon as I had secured their permission I disappeared behind the black cloth, with my loupe pressed against the ground glass. I would ask them not to move, then focus entirely

on the mechanical operations of the camera, shutting the lens, cocking the shutter, inserting the film cassette and finally raising the dark slide and pressing the cable release. In collusion with my subjects, I attempted to recreate the moment just before I approached them with my camera. I had the idea that I did not want to affect them with my subjectivity, and that not talking would help me achieve that. Only when the subjects attempted a smile in front of the camera would I engage with them more directly, commanding their face with mine, letting my concentrated features be mirrored on their faces. But it is hard to observe one's own interaction neutrally. This was not a lab situation. I am unable to coolly assess my own behaviour whilst at the same time producing a photograph in collaboration with someone else.

I set out the rules for this work, not with the intent to unmask individual characters, nor to chase a slippage between intention and effect. All of the sitters are strangers, approached as they go about prosaic moments in their day-to-day lives. I tried to give them a chance to choose how to represent themselves and their daily experience in a photographic portrait. By placing a large-format plate camera in front of my sitters, I invited them to make a choice of which pose to strike. The reactions of the strangers I accosted were varied; some continued to stare into space as if I did not exist. Others turned to face me, resisting the role of the anonymous stranger I cast them in, using the situation to create something akin to a classical portrait painting.

Despite the ambition to give the sitters carte blanche, so to speak, as to which pose to strike in front of the camera, one of the things that hits me when I view the resulting photographic prints is the similarity in response from the different sitters. Where do these facial expressions come from? Are they their own, or are they imported from somewhere else? If they are imported from somewhere else, might that somewhere else be located in my face? I tell myself that I should be observant, to see where else I might find similar expressions. I feel a need to visit portrait galleries and read newspapers, and to soak in the faces surrounding my quotidian life in an attempt to place my sitters in a wider context, outside the meeting between photographer and subject. My own face, however, is maybe the only one that is not so easily observed by myself. I'm not talking about the visage that faces me in the mirror, where every feature has been correctly aligned to its most flattering position. No, I mean another face, the face I wear after hours of solitary walking, up and down a station platform late at night.

Is there something particular in the meeting that makes the men take on these specific faces? Are they the same that they wore just before I approached them, the faces that attracted me to those particular individuals in the first place? Or does my intervention automatically change what is presented to one's surroundings. To be approached, solicited to appear in a photograph when moving around one's daily life is without doubt an occurrence out of the ordinary. To a certain extent, this removes the usual rules governing the gestures of social interaction, leaving a vacuum where expressions can be borrowed and personalities reinvented. Ordinarily, facial expressions are taken as the display of interior states and as a means of supplementing the communication that occurs through language. But what happens if the facial expression is borrowed from somewhere else? To quote James T. Siegel:

> To transfer a facial expression implies that one adds something to the repertoire available, a little like borrowing a word from a foreign language. But it also raises the question of whether, as in the case of the word, the expression is given sense. Is it inhabited by its wearer, as it were?[49]

Siegel goes on to question whether an expression borrowed in this sense does express the feeling or interior state that the borrower intended, or even if this kind of expression is at all able to express a sentiment. Is it possible for individuals to successfully appropriate expressions, make them their own? Starting as infants, we learn our facial expressions through imitation, confirming their effectiveness through the responses that they obtain. This sets a pattern that continues throughout life, as we all occasionally find ourselves wearing new expressions, picked up from a partner, a friend, a teacher or even a mass-media personality. As Georg Simmel notes, it is a risky process, as "aesthetically there is no other part of the body whose wholeness can as easily be destroyed by the disfigurement of only one of its elements".[50]

Now, looking at the work, I see that my elaborate constructions in order to avoid intersubjectivity and mirroring during the photography process miss the point. Constructing the portraiture situation like a reversed power relationship (now it was me, not the men, holding the power), yet trying to escape the dynamics of that, made me not see what in the end did make the work successful – a sense of tender compassion for the individuals behind the attributes, the ghosts in the shells, as it were, or those contained within these middle-aged bodies.

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49. James T Siegel *Objects and Objections of Ethnography*, (Fordham Univ Press, 2011), 7.
50. Georg Simmel, *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings* ed. David Patrick Frisby and Mike Featherstone. 1 edition, (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1998), 276.
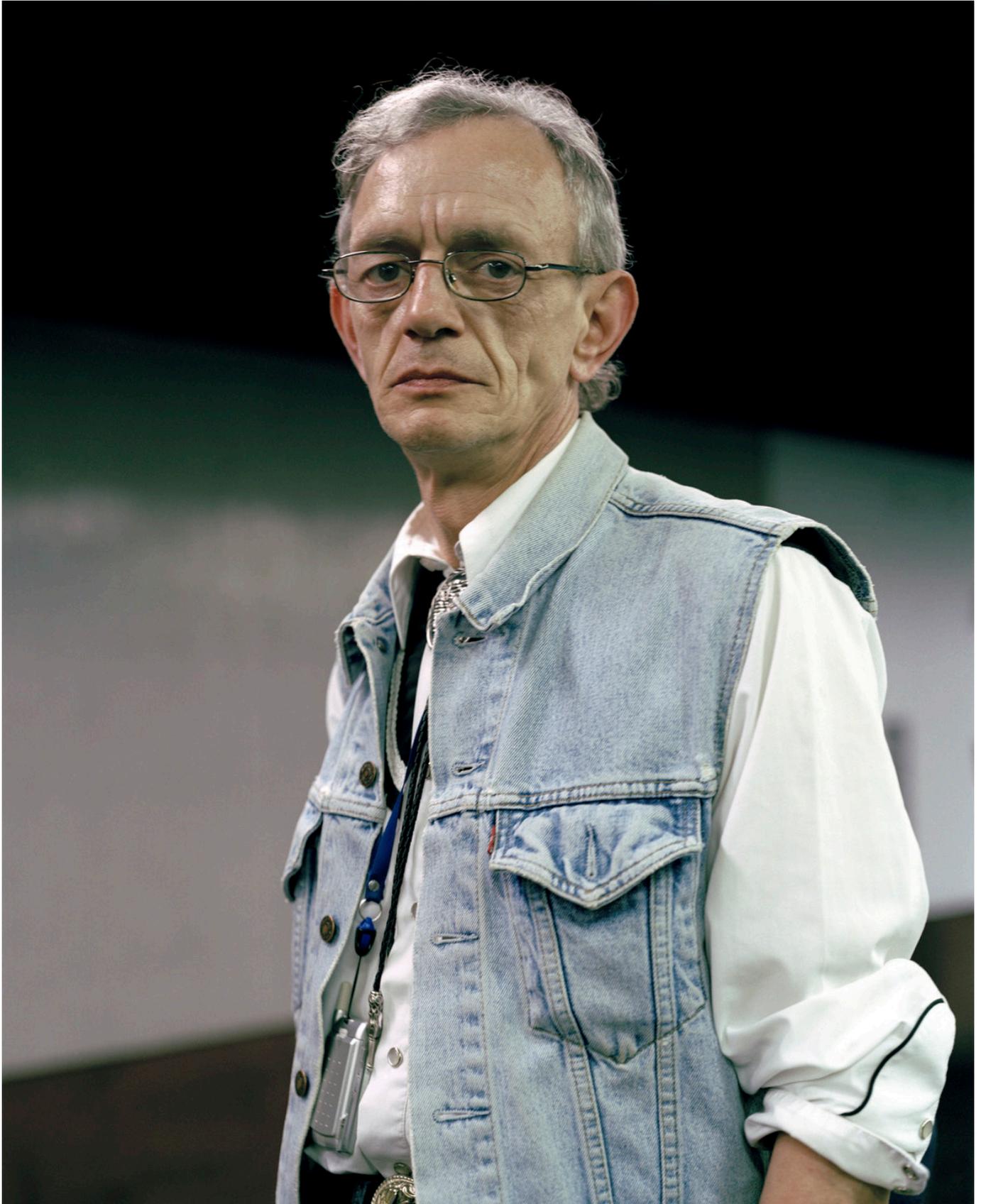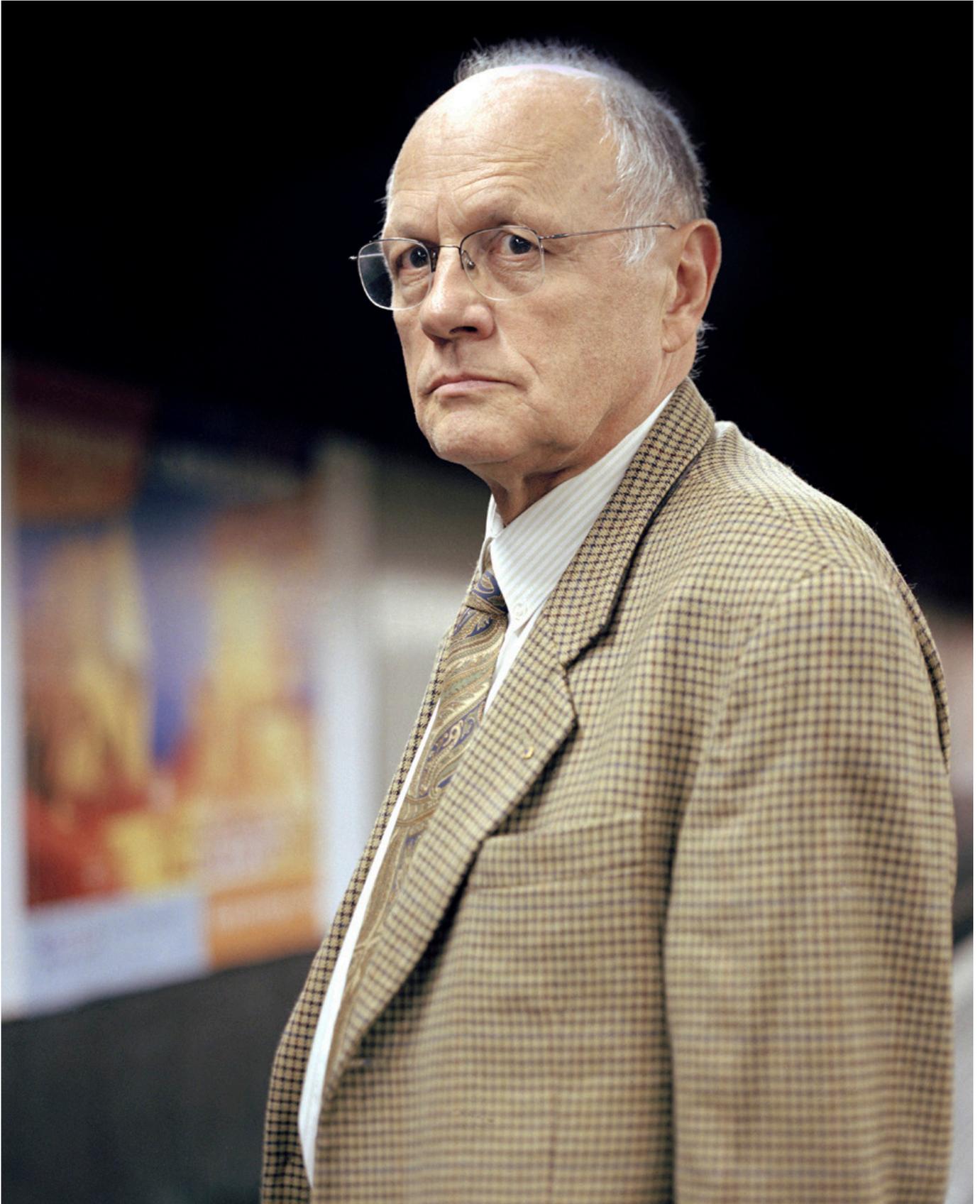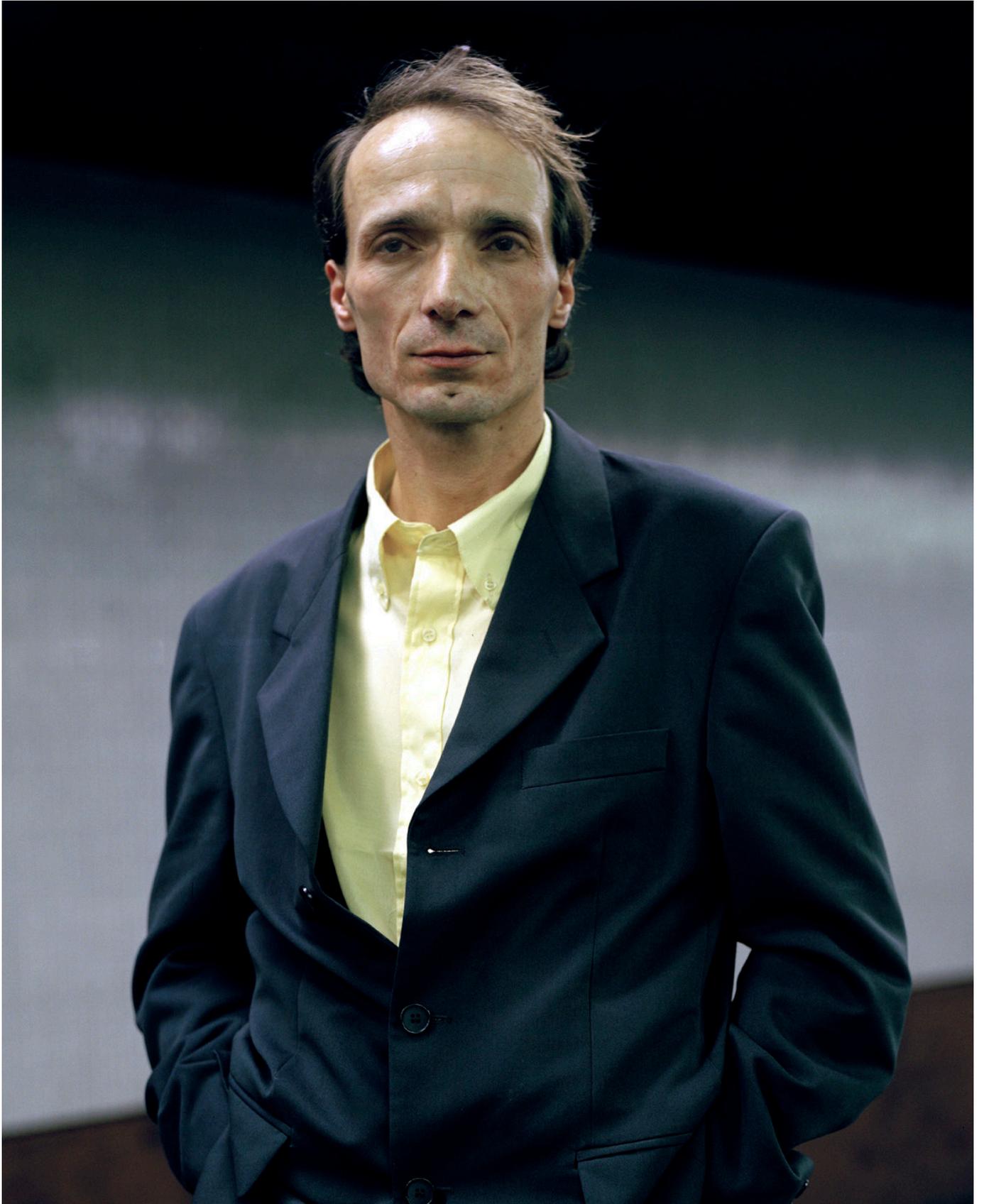
2.3 An Aside – the Necessary Issue of Consent

Writer and curator Helen James stated, during a conference on issues of consent in portrait photography, that we look to the photographer to exercise the right kind of power over their subjects. What then constitutes this right kind of power? As a photographer working with members of the public I need to consider what sort of contribution my work makes. Why do I make my images? Can I claim that the way I use my subjects is warranted for the greater good of society? Is my contribution unique, and therefore defensible? In what context will they be seen, and do I have control over their use? What are they saying? Are the images talking to others or themselves? Do the subjects engage with the camera in a way that might indicate consent to the photographer? Or do they look like they were bribed, bullied or coerced into taking part in my artistic project?[51]

Producing art through a relationship with another person creates a blurred yet distinctive difference between a piece of work *of* or *with* someone. I believe that my work is more a question of *with*, where there is no decisive moment when the camera shutter catches the subject unawares but, rather, a *decided* moment, agreed upon between the sitter and me. A momentary stage within the public space has been created, by the setting up of my camera. The protagonists get invited to enter this imaginary stage and perform their subjectivity, their identity.

I approach all my sitters before initiating the process of photographing them, briefly explaining my project and its dissemination (i.e. not in newspapers or magazines but, rather, in a gallery and/or book context) and asking if they would be willing to participate. So far I have not made my sitters sign model release forms as I feel very uncomfortable with a asking them to give up their rights in relation to the image. Model release forms connote a commercial context, where the image can be used for advertising purposes. I do not want my sitters to worry that their face might appear on a billboard advertising a random product in the future. Through my work I aim to make visible another's presence, another's world, focusing on a demographic group that very rarely gets a place on the walls of a gallery or in the pages of a book. It is impossible for me to answer the question of how my sitters would feel seeing portraits of themselves in the context

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51. Helen James, "Issues of Consent in the Photographic Portrait." (Conference on Photographic Portraiture, National Portrait Gallery, 2006)

of the series displayed on the walls of a gallery. And it demands a certain callousness on the part of the photographer, to choose, enlarge and display the defenceless face of another. I often feel uncomfortable, worried about showing something people did not want to be shown. Less like the hunter chasing that slippage between intention and effect, I attempt to reassure. You exist, and I can see you.

2.4 Thinking through Portraiture

Why then do some of these images 'work' and some not? What is it that makes the viewer connect with certain represented faces and not with others? And how can I possibly draw general conclusions from this? Do we all connect to images in the same way? Exhibiting portraits can be a disconcerting experience, as the audience reactions range from individuals being moved to tears to asking what all the football managers are doing displayed on a wall … so it seems clear to me that, just as each of us is more or less interested in the lives of others in real life, so there are individual differences in how we view photographic portraiture, beyond knowledge and interpretative abilities.

I will start by looking at the sitters that have chosen to look away, ignoring the camera and me in an apparent attempt to re-form the solitary moment that just got interrupted. Michael Fried writes about the French 18th-century critic Denis Diderot's view on genre paintings, "simply disregarding the beholder was not enough. It was necessary to obliviate him, to deny his presence, to establish positively insofar as that could be done that he had not been taken into account."[52] The more absorbed in concentration the character in the painting appears, the more convinced we are that he is not aware of being beheld. And if he is not aware of being beheld, surely then the expression that we see on his face must be his own. Unchanged by the presence of an artist with a camera or paintbrush.

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52. Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*. New edition edition. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 103.

The more my subjects seem absorbed into some inner, private, thoughts, in a moment of longer duration than the fraction of a section it takes for the shutter to open and to close again, the more engrossing the resulting image. But can this go too far? Doesn't a succession of images of men staring into the middle distance risk appearing overly theatrical? After all, we all know that both the camera and I were present, a mere footstep away. Are we not simply witnessing my sitter's skill in acting, or mine at directing? Trying to pinpoint which images work and which do not confuses me; my vocabulary does not seem precise enough to specify the feeling that is conveyed in what I consider to be the stronger pieces.

So how about the men that chose to face the camera – or myself, hovering just above it? To borrow Fried's words again: "the portrait calls for exhibiting a subject, the sitter, to the public gaze: put another way, the basic action depicted in a portrait is the sitter's presentation of himself or herself to be beheld."[53] Of course, this action is present in both the cases where the sitter chose to acknowledge the camera or myself, and those where he did not. But in the instances when my sitters engage directly with the camera, sometimes staring it down with a put-upon strength, even arrogance, and at other times making their solitude and vulnerability manifest, we are under the impression that the sitters are communicating directly with us, and that through their gaze we can gain access to their interiority. When my work is at its most successful, Levinas's theories seem to come into play, of the face as a redemptive surface, something that enables us to see beyond conventions[54]. We approach the illusion that we know the sitters, as we mentally invent a life and character for them. Is it possible that the gap I am looking for when creating my images, in psychological as well as sociogeographical terms,[55] has the added effect on my sitters of making them lose their conception of themselves as of a certain kind? There is a defamiliarization taking place, and with that defamiliarization the knowledge of how to act in a certain given situation disappears.

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53. Ibid., 109
54.   See page 19 for a discussion, and Levinas, 133
55. By sociogeographical gap, I refer to choosing to set up my camera in transitional places such as train stations, hospital lobbies and public walkways.

What does the lack of smiles in my work mean? One way of thinking about smiling is as evidence of masking.[56] By not allowing the men to smile, meeting every attempt in that direction with a neutral, serious expression, I am denying them the opportunity to hide.

The smile is an almost automatic response to the camera being pointed at one's person, and from infancy we are trained to smile for our parents' camera, for the school photograph, for the holiday snaps with friends and lovers. This smiling face is not connected to reality; it is a photo-face. I am interested in capturing another, more private expression.

Like a Baudelairian flâneur, I am attracted to small moments of everyday experience that make me *feel,* make me share the humanity of the other. Small moments that emerge from the weave of our everyday existence and reach directly into my body, like a miniscule dagger poking my insides. Reminding me that I am not alone. Teasing me out of my shell, connecting me to my surroundings. Psychoanalyst Darian Leader suggests the role of art in society is to provide a set of tools to help us mourn, and that art can lead the way in helping people understand that we all need to find individual ways of expressing our emotions.[57] I would like to extend the concept to not only include mourning but also a sense of disconnection – not one brought on by mourning or loss, but an ever-present feeling of alienation created by the limits of one's capacity for human interaction. Leader goes on to quote psychoanalyst Ginette Raimbault: "What no one can understand about my pain, someone can express in such a way that I can recognize myself in what I cannot share."[58] It is here the roots of my practice can be found, the drive that makes me go out again and again with my camera, in search of a subject in possession of a face that can help me articulate, through a photographic portrait, that unspeakable connectedness with others.

> *Today I went in search of an elusive subject again. I saw him first two years ago, wearing blue, washed-out tights, doing lap after lap on the large speed-skating oval on the outskirts of town. A very old body with incredibly long limbs. He hunches over on his speed-skates, slowly swinging his long arms from side to side, looking stiff, fragile and vulnerable as he moves forward at a pace that, although it is considerably faster than mine,*

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56. Paul Ekman and Wallace V Friesen, *Unmasking the Face: A Guide to Recognizing Emotions from Facial Clues.* (Gift Edition edition. Prentice-Hall, 1975), 81.
57. Darian Leader, *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia and Depression*, (London: Penguin, 2009), 87-88.
58. Ginette Raimbault quoted in Ibid., 88.

looks like slow motion. I have wanted to film him since I first saw him. At night in the dark, with the only light coming from a tracking camera running alongside him at a fixed distance. His body's slow laborious movements will fill the frame in a continuous flow. It resonates with my body, in pain and effort. I see him having to bow to old age, to slow down stiff muscles. I am fascinated by those movements where one can discern a whole life. Like watching the old man I met in Norway this summer. His body knew exactly what it needed to do. I wish now that I had filmed him cutting the grass with his old wooden reaper rather than photographing him in the studio. He, too, was over 80 and very tall. So I have a type, it seems.

I did not find the man at the ice rink, but another old skater, a former world champion, told me the man's name. E. He doesn't skate well, the champion skater said, he doesn't do oversteps. I had to explain that I was interested in the effort rather than the result. He told me the old man walks across town every day to the skating rink. E is a loner, he said, a strange character. He is a millionaire, yet he finds food in skips. He doesn't use buses. He used to travel abroad without bringing any money, that sort of thing.

When I got home, I googled E. I found out he was a writer. In the '70s and '80s he published poetry and diarist travel books from far-flung places. The ghost of Vivian Maier reappears – an ageing dumpster diver, of sensitive and artistic inclination. A loner in old age. Yet to me he signalled beauty and grace, some of that deep humanity of the old man in Werckmeister Harmonies, *before whose presence we need to put everything but compassion and empathy aside.*

So, thinking through making has led me towards the importance of the exchange between faces and subjectivities. If the face takes a more privileged position over other body parts for its (possibly) superior abilities in communication, then in the same way the eyes must be predicated over the rest of the face. The following section discusses the importance of the gaze in establishing a basis for communication.

2.5 On Looking

The importance of the mutual look cannot be underestimated. The interchange of looks is something that is with us from birth, as the primary means of communication between mother and baby. We know that the earliest brain developments in human infants are fuelled by mother and child looking at each other's eyes and faces. Leading neuropsychoanalyst Allan Schore calls this process ´psychobiological attunement´ and goes on to state that "The mother's emotionally expressive face is the most potent source of visuoaffective information and in face-to-face interactions it serves as a visual imprinting system for the infant's developing nervous system."[59] Preverbal interaction is thus entirely central to our early lives, and without it we would not be able to grow and develop. It is no wonder that the human face in the form of portraits is commonly used as a means of communication. Yet there must be a difference between how we look at the actual face of another, and how we view a photographically reproduced face.[60]

In contemporary Western society there are set rules in place regarding both how to look at others, and how to avoid it. Maintaining the social equilibrium of pretending to ignore others reinforces our sense of security when in public. This is made manifest by the ritual avoidance of eye contact, where only small children are exempt from the rule by being too young to have learnt it. To look at someone is perceived as an act of aggression. Witness Robert de Niro in *Taxi Driver* pulling his guns out in front of the mirror: "Are you looking at me? I don't see anybody else here so you must be looking at me."[61] This can be contrasted with the photograph, an artefact that allows us to look at others for an extended period of time.

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59. Allan N Schore, *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development.* 1 edition, (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999) 91.

60. My son O was born in the middle of this PhD. It constituted a pivotal moment, when I left ideas of the fragmented self behind: thoughts that the only thing you can photograph are reflections of your own face. In contrast, I was struck by how much of him was already present to me, from the very first moment we set eyes on one another. Existing in an intense non-verbal interaction, looking at O's face and thinking of how it interacted with mine, this dance of mirroring made me consider how language can get in the way of meeting the other. Perhaps it is precisely this lack of verbal interaction that draws me towards strangers, especially in other countries. When we cannot access a shared language, all we have left is looking. Is this the key to why so many of the anthropological photographs have a hold of me? Or the images from Tuol Sleng? Situations where there would have been no, or barely any, verbal interaction between subject and photographer?

61. *Taxi Driver* directed by Martin Scorsese, 1976, (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2007), DVD.

Eyes have existed for some 400 million years and as soon as eyes started being used by predators when stalking their prey it would have been advantageous for the prey to be able to sense when they were being looked at. Many animals react by escaping when they are in the proximity of something resembling an eye. Butterflies, peacocks and some types of tropical fish all have eyelike

markings, usually a spot of colour inside a ring of another colour, a so-called ocellus, that are used for defensive purposes. Perhaps it is not so strange that the act of being observed carries connotations of danger and aggression. Robert Sheldrake has interviewed security personnel working with CCTV, many of whom insisted that people know instinctively when they are being looked at through the security camera.[62] Leader, moreover, makes a connection between the ocellus and the camera lens. They can both be defined as eyes that cannot see, like the eyes of the blind, and as such inherently more unnerving than ordinary eyes.[63]

The gaze contains an immanent power relationship and this is further increased when the gazed upon is denied the possibility of reciprocity. Both dark sunglasses and one-way mirrors in police interview rooms work as implements of intimidation. The gazed upon is put into position as inert and defenceless by their inability to return the gaze directed upon them. What was a horizontal, interactive, democratic act of communication is transformed into a unidirectional, vertical demonstration of power that enforces subjectivity, passivity. Interestingly, it matters less if the gazed upon is really observed or not; the insecurity of not knowing suffices. With this uncertainty comes an increased lack of control over the image one projects. Part of what can make blind people disconcerting may be that we cannot verify if they truly are blind. How do they perceive us? We feel an anxiety adjoined to the lack of control over how they read us. Thus the 'gaze' of the camera lens can be seen to amplify the discomfort we feel when being looked at by ordinary eyes, as a result of both our inability to return the gaze, and the absence of influence over how we are being seen.

Leader declares that most humans find it so unbearable to be stared at that they feel compelled to assume a mask in order to cope with the gaze. Generally we have all experienced feeling anxiety or a sense of shame when we realize that we are being observed in a private situation,

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62. David Brittain, 'Eye Contact: Interview with Rupert Sheldrake' in *Creative Camera* no. 341 (1996), 18.
63. Darian Leader, *Stealing the Mona Lisa: What Art Stops Us from Seeing* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002), 35.

regardless of whether we are doing anything illicit or not. We swiftly rearrange our facial features to correspond to our public persona.[64] According to Leader, Lacan emphasizes the fact that we are being looked at before we ever look, and so the gaze becomes caught up in this interchange. Leader goes as far as to argue, "we see each other, or strive to be seen, as we imagine others look at us".[65] So it follows that what one sees with one's own eyes is mixed up with the question of what someone else sees.

It is interesting to consider that, when sculptures or other artworks containing a face are destroyed, the eyes are often defaced first, as if it makes the process of destruction easier when the work cannot look back.[66] This can be seen as a manifestation of sorts of the deeply held human belief in the inherent, malignant force that resides in the gaze. In most cultures in the world the concept of the evil eye exists in one form or another.[67] It is usually associated with a belief in the destructive power of the look, projected either from a man, object or animal as an expression of envy, greed or aggression. This gaze can be debilitating, and cause bad luck, illness or even death.[68]

Craig Owens poses the question of whether the camera is "simply a device engineered to reproduce the effects of the evil eye".[69] Just like the evil eye is thought to have the power to kill, so the camera can arrest movement and hence freeze life. Through his reading of Lacan, Owens proposes that the freezing into a pose that often occurs, completely unnecessarily from a technical viewpoint, when someone is about to be photographed, is in fact a resistance on the part of the subject. Rather than freezing in order to aid the photographer, the subject stays still as a way to protect himself from the malevolent gaze.[70] Hence a mimicking of the reaction of many animals when perceiving a threat, perhaps through the eyes of the predator, occurs. The evil eye could also be considered another potential explanation for the necessity of wearing masks.

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64. Ibid., 19
65. Ibid., 16.
66. Ibid., 18.
67. Rupert Sheldrake, *Seven Experiments That Could Change the World: A Do-It-Yourself Guide to Revolutionary Science*. New edition edition. (Rochester, Vt: Inner Traditions Bear and Company, 2002), 89.
68. Edward S and Virginia Mason Gifford, *The Evil Eye; Studies in the Folklore of Vision. Drawings by Virginia Mason Gifford*. 1st Edition edition. (New York MacMillan, 1958), 4.
69. Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power and Culture*. New Ed edition. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 210.
70. Ibid., 211.

Just as the origin of the tradition for brides to wear veils at their weddings is probably to protect them from the evil eye,[71] so the mask can be thought to be there "not to express anything, but to ward off an evil force."[72] In the following chapter I will describe some moments I felt unable to photograph – where it would not have been appropriate to include my camera – or even, perhaps, for me to let my eyes linger in the first place.

2.5.1 Writing some moments I could not capture photographically, I

The evenings I spent in the station were full of meetings.[73] The homeless young man, so eager to show that he was out of the gutter, now trying to rebuild his life, with difficulty but determination. Telling me his story, not really in search of compassion so much as having a strong desire to simply share, with someone, anyone. "The stranger …. often receives the most surprising revelations and confidences, at times reminiscent of a confessional, about matters which are kept carefully hidden from everybody with whom one is close." [74] When I enter a particular location to work, whether it is for a duration of hours or days, I am very much a stranger on these terms. The camera invites confidences because it makes me conspicuous, placing me outside of the day-to-day life.

And all the others, the others, in this never-ending theatre of human emotion. The happy families, with everyone hugging, the lost father with the three surly but incredibly attractive teenage daughters, the mismatched couples, the too-well-matched couples. The little boy with the crazy mum. The old man who appeared to be made out of paper, so fragile that if you touched him he might crumble. At ten in the evening, platform B, every evening, summer and winter, I saw him wait for his train. What was a man like him

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71. Gifford, 33.
72. Leader, *Stealing..*, 43.

73. In the words of Ronald Barthes, the station is "a vast organism which houses the big trains, the urban trains, the subway, a department store, and a whole underground commerce – the station gives the district this landmark which, according to certain urbanists, permits the city to signify, to be read". Human drama, tragedy, happiness, it's all to be found there. *Roland Barthes, Empire of Signs* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983), 56.

74. Simmel, 145.

doing traversing the big city late at night? I photographed him once. But the resulting image turned him into an ordinary old man; the white skin no longer translucent like rice paper. Another evening, standing around, waiting, at the far end of a platform. A young man was leaning up against the wall, wearing the latest in the American-style hip-hop look so popular in the suburbs. I couldn't help sneaking looks at his posturing appearance, his macho swagger, whereupon I saw a lonely tear make its way down his cheek. I looked away, thinking that what I had seen was nothing more than a slightly irritated eye; but there it was, he was crying, trying to conceal the tears as best he could, wiping them away in-between the hard-boy poses. Suddenly the presence of my camera felt wholly inappropriate. Suppressing my desire to approach the young man I walked away, adhering to the rules of privacy of the big city.

2.6 On Writing

To write about experiences, or to render them photographically? The photographic process is complicated. It involves asking for, and being granted, permission. It involves collaboration. Photography is something which "reaches into the world as an intruder and therefore creates a disturbance".[75] An awareness of the upheaval creates a weight, and is something one has to navigate as a practitioner. A developed sense of empathy can, from this perspective, work as a hindrance rather than the aid, or even prerequisite, it normally is when connecting with others. Writing, on the other hand, is self-sufficient. Ethical issues are still present if the task is to create a written representation of another, but the act itself is discreet and can be done hidden away. Photography, however, is, at least in my own practice, necessarily co-located and embodied. I must interact to create, form a relationship, however temporary, with my subject. Rather than simply observe from a distance.

Walter Benjamin claims that "something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences".[76] The reason for this,

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75. Rudolf Arnheim, *New Essays on the Psychology of Art*, (University of California Press, 1986), 105.
76. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* New Ed edition, (London: Pimlico, 1999), 83.

in Benjamin's view, is that everything is already too explained, the stories too infused with elucidations. He goes on to state that this, in fact, constitutes half the art of storytelling, "to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it."[77] Let the reader interpret in a way that makes sense to him/her, and the story will achieve dimensions that information lacks. This can stand as a parameter of what I set out to achieve, both in my visual works and my writing.

Baudelaire's cycle of prose poems is a good example of the kind of writing I am interested in. The prose poems contained in the collection *Spleen* are an engaging attempt to use poetic will to transform the ugly and the everyday. They are an effort to understand the urban experience, and can be seen as a literary replication of the erratic wanderings of a stroller, a flâneur, through the streets of Paris. Baudelaire describes the city of his experience as both beautiful and squalid, and the magic of the anonymous chance encounters that typify urban life. He uses fragmentation, disruption and dislocation and surprising juxtapositions to conjure the experience of an unstable and menacing city. Some passages have an almost uncanny effect on me, as they so echo the feelings I had when making certain images, mostly on the streets of Paris. Here is Baudelaire's description of an encounter in 'The Widows': "which is the sadder widow, which inspires more melancholy, she who holds by the hand an urchin who cannot share her thoughts, or she who walks quite alone? I cannot decide…."[78] .

The poem brings to mind a portrait of a mother and son I found on the platform of an RER station on the outskirts of Paris. The childish colours of the architecture set up a jarred note with the inhabitants of the space. There is a certain sense of weight, a sadness, perhaps, in the woman's appearance, a feeling that she seems unable to share with her child. They are mutually avoiding both looking at each other and making bodily contact. Both look utterly alone, together. You may ask, upon reading this, as did Baudelaire's imaginary companion, "Are you sure this legend is the true one?" And I will answer with his words: "But what do I care for the facts, if this reality which is outside me has helped me live, to know I exist, to understand the kind of man I am?"[79] And join the long line of artists, who, in the years that have passed since Baudelaire walked the streets of Paris, have aspired to become the new Painters of Modern Life.

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77. Benjamin, 87.
78. Charles Baudelaire and ed. Louise Varèse, *Paris Spleen*, (New York: New Directions, 1970), 21.
79. Ibid., 12.

So it follows that using writing as a tool helped me identify exactly what I am in search of when I photograph – those moments when I feel the boundaries between self and other dissolve. In the following section I will describe the next practice project, where I put photography to one side and relied on *writing* my experiences: the intersubjective encounters with others.

2.6.1 Practice II, *A Place To Call Home*

DV, 11 minutes. Shown as a large video projection with sounds on speakers in a darkened space, exact size depending on the screening space.

A three-month residency in the Israeli Negev Desert.[80] I was invited to create portraits of inhabitants of development towns[81] in the Negev for an exhibition in Jerusalem. A week after my arrival, war between Israel and Lebanon broke out.[82] Watching planes and helicopters loaded with bombs fly overhead, only to return bare, their deadly cargo unloaded over the inhabitants of Lebanon, made the thought of creating artworks difficult. I felt a need to understand the country that hosted me, this place of immense history, conflict and contradiction, so I travelled around in the company of the curator, planning to make portraits of people I encountered along the way, much in the same way that I created *Returns.*

> *The first part of the journey. Getting on the bus in Tel Aviv and asking for a ticket to Umm al-Fahm, it became immediately apparent that something was out of the ordinary. Umm al-Fahm, the driver said, raising his eyebrows, what on earth are you going there for? It is an Arabic city. Half an hour later, getting off the bus at a stop along the main motorway, something was different. The air, the smells and the landscape had remained the same, but the demographics had shifted. Here we were looked at, observed, mostly with*

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80. Midbar/Unidee, a residency directed by Rafram Chaddad, Mitzpe Ramon, Israel. 5th of July - 30th of September 2006.
81. Constructed from the 1950s onwards as part of a population decentralization plan with the goal of conquering the frontiers of the territory.
82. The Second Lebanon War 2006, 12th of July - 14th of August 2006

curiosity or desire, but also, it has to be admitted, with hostility. Should I have worn my full-length skirt I asked myself, would that have been more respectful? Beautiful proud men, looking, staring, with a mixture of desire and hostility.

We were picked up by a young man, who took us to the computer shop where he worked. I began taking photographs. It was hard. How do I look at an Arabic man, me, who claims to be completely unprejudiced? The man, too, felt shy, unsure of how to meet me. It was as if I were unable to command the situation, create enough intimacy to really communicate with him. It was too fast, too soon. Neither of us was ready for the intensity of the face-to-face meeting. His status as a victim confused me. How can I relate to Palestinians whilst enjoying the hospitality of Israel? I wanted to say, to imply, hey, I'm one of the good guys. I am on your side. I came to meet you. But nonetheless I reside on the other side of the fence, sleeping in beautiful desert farms, eating gourmet meals, and drinking wine from vineyards created on the land of his banished people. How, then, can I possibly be one of the good guys? One hour in an Arabic city will not redeem that. Maybe the reason all of us on the residency feel compelled to make 'political' art, regardless of where our 'normal' practice is situated, is that we feel guilty. Guilty for enjoying our stay in the comfortable bubble, whilst hearing artillery fire shelling Gaza in the background.

An hour later the visit on the other side was over and we were back at the bus stop. The bus arrived, driven by an Israeli macho man with a shaved head and strong shoulders. Despite his appearance he was visibly nervous having to stop his bus outside this, the biggest Arabic city on Israeli territory. "Hurry, hurry," he said, "just get on", when I started searching my purse for the correct change. The bus, filled with soldiers, was quickly set in motion, driving onwards to safer territory.

Another change of buses. A small station, almost devoid of people, except soldiers. We are continuing north. After an hour or so night comes, and with it darkness. This darkness makes our entry into the war zone all the more spectacular. A fire on our right-hand side, a fire more beautiful than any I have ever seen in my life. And then a second fire on the left-hand side, a third, a fourth. My naïve surprise: is this what war looks like? Are the rockets really falling here, now? We get off the bus at the last stop, and continue by

hitchhiking towards our final destination, loud sounds breaking the calmness of the night. This is real. This is scary. Rockets are falling here, around us. Is this an air alarm? Is it this side hitting the other, or them hitting us? I am angry, angry with myself for being so ill-informed, and angry with R for not finding out that bombs were falling here before we set off on our crazy mission. I who, when I saw the frightening scene of the Israeli air force practising carpet-bombing in the desert whilst I was on a hike the day before the war started, swore to myself that I would not go near any war zone.

Arriving at our destination I feel ashamed. How could we be so stupid? Bumbling ill-informed artists, tourists into other people's misery. Whoops, is there a war going on? Really? Here? No, we just came for the barbeque. Foreign war correspondents in flak jackets stare at us, their brows furrowed. Weeks of hard work can be read on their faces, months of witnessing the unspeakable.

Going to sleep later that night in the village bomb shelter; all the suites of the small hotel our host runs are booked out by foreign media. I have a vision of a rocket landing on the party we just left, of us getting up in the morning and finding a fire in place of the hotel. The noise of gunfire can be heard throughout the night. Are people getting killed by these guns? Now? What is the reality like on the other side of the border? After breakfast an air alarm, and directly afterwards a loud boom. A rocket has landed just beyond the row of houses we are in. We run back into the shelter with some of the foreign journalists, but somehow it is hard to take it seriously. I don't feel afraid anymore. The war bug has bitten me, the excitement, the bonding. The siege mentality. When we get back to the nearest village, Kiryat Shmona, it is me, not R., who wants to linger in the deserted town, a village in which the ground is scorched by fires and whose surrounding hills are hidden by smoke.[83]

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83.   This journey was referenced in Benny Ziffer's article in Haaretz newspaper on the occasion of R's incarceration and eventual release from Libyan prison in 2010: " The last time we met was in the middle of the night, in the north, during the Second Lebanon War. Katyushas were flying and the forest between Kiryat Shmona and Metula was burning. And I was heading in my old Ford Fiesta toward a kibbutz in the Galilee panhandle where a diaper factory was being bombed. And who was standing by the side of the road and looking for a ride? Rafram, with a Swedish photographer, off to do a project which they explained as we drove."
"Artist in a Cage - Haaretz Daily Newspaper Israel News." http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/week-s-end/artist-in-a-cage-1.307848.

As a newcomer, a guest in Israeli society, I am constantly being presented with politicized narratives. Casual encounters turn into meetings between informer and informed. How to defend oneself from all these ready-made perspectives and subjective histories? You are either with us or against us, friend or enemy. An attack on us, in this vulnerable position we are in, could destroy us. Who are you, a fascist?

I felt a need to make some of these narratives explicit. The stories were too important to discard, to remain as anecdotes for myself only. Perhaps the urge to use text was an attempt too at making my own position more clear, to communicate what I had learnt of Israels history and the condition of life for its inhabitants. I experimented combining my portraits with short text, stories I had been told during the meetings in conjunction with the images. But these attempts ended up as an unequal marriage. The text renders the images superfluous, as it allows us to focus our search for meaning in the text rather than in the representation of the face of the other. Thinking of how else include narrative text gave me the idea of borrowing a video camera, creating filmed interviews of some of the people I had previously photographed. But I found the faces distracting, they and their immediate surroundings proclaiming too much. In a photographic portrait, the voice of the person is suppressed. Once I combined both voice and face, something was lost. Our imagination is not asked to fill in any gaps; the talking heads constitute a format we are familiar with from cheap televised documentaries.

I re-thought what to do once more and reconstructed, through writing, an imaginary walk through an anonymous development town in the Israeli Negev desert, and used fragments from my encounters with the inhabitants as a narrative. This allowed me to make explicit that the narrative is mediated through me, subjective and by no means complete, nor setting out an undisputable truth, in a way I was unable to do when connecting people's narrative's to their portraits. The title of the project is borrowed from a prospectus encouraging the Jewish diaspora to immigrate to Israel, proclaiming the merits of life in the Holy Land. Combining empty views of the built environment with fragmented testimonies, the film show a very different reality: certain waves of immigrants haven't known anything but peripheral zones of habitation, becoming only a demographic number to be counted in a society under threat. The quiet film resulting from the meetings with the inhabitants of the desert poses the question of what their

role is: that of hero, victims or perpetrators.

When using moving images the power relationship is other – here, the image is usually dominant, driving the narrative forward. A recorded woman's voice – not mine – retells the story whilst slow, unbearably long clips of cityscapes from development towns in the Negev can be seen. The lack of occurrences, of narrative or drama in the clips echo the sense of emptiness the narrative expresses. Using video rather than still photography for the first time was primarily a means of letting the narrative unfold over time, but it also becomes a means of forcing the viewer to hold the image for an extended duration, mirroring the boredom and emptiness that characterizes the locations.

Script:

I was trying to understand.

So when I saw Aziza standing in the doorway of her house, something in her eyes made me approach her. After we arrived into Israel they brought us here, she said. There was only sand. No water, nothing. We had to pay a lot of money to get a place on the boat. The man that registered us said that there are lots of fruits in Israel, fruits and white pigeons. We used to buy pigeons for a lot of money there, so we felt excited. But when we came here there was not even bread.

They brought us here on trucks. When we arrived nobody wanted to get off. The driver started the truck again, and drove us around in a circle in the sand. Then he took us back to the same spot. He told us that it was a different place. When we still didn't get down he got out and left the truck. So when night fell we had no choice but to get off and enter the houses.

My husband got a job plastering houses. So many houses had to be built, for the people that kept arriving. In that time there was no hand cream, so he had to use margarine. Over there he used to run his own business. After a while he sent a letter to his sister asking her to find a house again, in Morocco. He wanted to go back. But I didn't want to go back. I would have felt ashamed in front of my family and friends.

I left Aziza standing in the doorway and kept walking.

I called a friend who used to live here. I don't want to talk about it, he said. I don't

remember anything from that place. It has nothing to do with me. I never had any connection with it. He

quickly said goodbye and put the phone down.

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A while later a young man approached me. He started talking. The first thing that struck me when I got off the

plane is how small everything is, he said, small and faded by the sun. We felt like strangers here. It was hard

to be accepted. We didn't understand the locals, a different mentality. We stuck together with our own people.

I was very proud to serve in the army. I was maybe over-motivated. When you are over-motivated there are a

lot of things that are disappointing. But I gave my part to this country, to the survival, and now I feel like I

have earned the right to live here.

People here say that we are Russian. There, they said that we were Jewish. But look, I'm not angry about that

anymore.

He shook my hand and said goodbye.

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I sat down in a cafe to have lunch. The owner joined me. My parents came here from Baghdad in 1951. Look, I

have their passport here and it is written: exit only, to go but not return. My parents, in this way, they finished

the Diaspora of maybe 2000 years. My mother used to be called Samira. When she came she had to change it.

A Jewish woman can't be called Samira here.

I was born here and my father was very ecstatic: you will never know what is the ghetto; you will never know

what is the meaning of ghetto. The first generation thought that their children would be completely clean from

fears, and that they would be healthy, happy and secure. And now we are in the same situation again.

I finished my lunch and walked back into the sunshine.

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Two girls were sitting in the shade of some pine trees. They looked like sisters. One of them offered me a glass of water. Our parents came when they were 18, directly here, they told me. Nobody gave them an option to choose. The government sent them where they thought it would be good for the country. They set my parents' future and their present at the same time. Only educated people knew that the centre would be better. But the government wanted to develop the desert. The people here never had the same chance. They were brought into these places. There is no work here. There is nothing. Half the people here are Russian, the others from Morocco. The government didn't think at all. They paid the city halls to receive people. Like cattle. There was a price on every person's head. But we want to stay here. We believe this town has a future. We just hope that it comes soon.

I thanked them for the water and left.

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I saw a man waiting for the next bus to Be'er Sheva, a small bag by his feet. He told me he had been visiting his mother. I asked him what it felt like, growing up here. My experience was that I was alone, he said. I felt very alone. I felt different from everyone else. On the outside I might have seemed like I had many friends. But that was only on the outside. In my home I felt alone too. My father hit me. In those years it was part of the education. It was common. I had a lot of arguments and fights with my sisters, because it was a small flat and we shared a room. My father solved these problems by hitting us.

What I remember most when I got older was that there was nothing to do. I spent most of my time with a group of friends, and our mission was to protect ourselves from reality. We felt locked into this small town, wanting to fly but there were no opportunities. It felt like a prison. There was nowhere to go. But I knew all the time that there was something else, somewhere else, I just didn't know what it was, or what I was looking for. I only knew that I wanted to be there.

The bus arrived and the man boarded it.

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I followed Yusef to his balcony. The sun was going down. He had a view over the whole town.

This is Israel, he said. The closest place to God. Centre of the universe. Everyone thinks that the world is running around, but it is the universe running around the centre here. This is my home. This is your home. This is where we belong.

In conclusion, *A Place to Call Home* exist in various incarnations depending on the context. The moving image part has been shown in exhibition spaces and as part of various film festivals, and the portraits, unframed and printed in various formats have been exhibited and published. I prefer showing the moving image part however, as the work marked a shift away from the traditional photographic portrait, and opened up my practice towards other ways of creating an art work out of my empathic meetings with other subjectivities. In terms of how the audience is positioned in relation to the work, I also find the moving image part more succesful. Here the audience is taken in hand, directed to look and to listen for a predetermined amount of time. The portraits are both harder to place and easier to dismiss. Perhaps because the framework for them was too open - unlike *Returns,* where I chose one space and one demographic group; the inhabitants were too diverse to be distilled into a relatively small selection of potraits.

2.6.2 Writing some moments I could not capture photographically, II

Upon my return to London I kept writing down those moments of daily life that touched me. I am beginning to see, through the writing, how empathy and our connections with others form the central point that all my work revolves around. Furthermore, this *seeing through writing* rather than *seeing through the camera* liberates my practice from the strict confines of photographic portraiture. I investigate my own *drive* to take photographs, rather than the photographs themselves.

I have heard so many conversations of heartbreak recently. First there was the girl, speaking on her mobile phone in Swedish, on the number 49 bus in Chelsea. She kept pleading with her lover to realize how much he loved her, to change his mind. Or to make his mind up. She was hurt, upset, and unable to terminate the conversation. Why? Why? Why don't you want to be with me?

The second conversation took place nearby, on a bus ride from Sloane Square across Battersea Bridge. It was already underway when I approached the front seats of a double-decker bus. I caught the man, or boy, looking at me with something approaching annoyance when I sat down, across the aisle on an otherwise empty deck. I didn't realize why at first. It was only when I kept hearing the words "I have to see you", in heavily Swedish-accented English, that I understood. But then it was too late to move. "I have to see you. Now. Only for five minutes. But I have to see you. It doesn't matter why. I just have to see you. I have to know that you will do this for me. That you will see me when I need to see you. Now. Only for five minutes". The boyman, manboy, wore a bright green shirt. I wondered about the person at the other end of the phone. His lover. Was it a man or a woman? Had they been lovers for some time? He left the bus, still on the phone, and my eyes followed his green figure moving down the street until I couldn't see him anymore.

Another day, this time in the library. A beautiful Dane, on the phone to a long-lost friend in Melbourne, speaking of her lover leaving her some months ago. Life has been chaotic, she said. I haven't had much life lately. I haven't been in touch with anyone. I started counselling. It became very chaotic. Very destructive. I would love to see you. I would love to visit. I love you so much. She hung up and went back to her reading. I felt strange, sitting so close to her, side by side. Knowing all this about her. What had he been like, the man that left her?

I went upstairs. Two young men were already sitting at the long table, facing each other. I sat down next to them; they were of that indefinable type. The type that looks like someone young, that looks like someone old. It has something to do with the clothes, maybe, or with the posture. With how they comb their hair. There is a sense of not quite inhabiting a

body as much as inhabiting a brain. Or is the plastic that they are made of somehow less malleable, or shaped by other forces than their contemporaries are, to paraphrase Kenneth Gergen?

One of the men was talking. He talked of walking. He talked of being a fast walker. He talked of always having a goal when walking. If there wasn't a pre-existing one, he would invent one. He talked of walking next to his mother. The man opposite was quiet. He nodded and made small sounds of reassurance. He did not ask any questions, nor did he talk of how he walked. Somehow the topic shifted to Caviar. The talking man talked of Caviar. He talked about not liking it. He talked of not remembering what fish black caviar originates from. He talked about it, he talked around it, but never did he ask the question. A gap in the monologue appeared. And then, timid, quiet, I heard the voice of the other man for the first time. Sturgeon, he said. Sturgeon from the Black Sea.

The men were both eating. The talker had an old-fashion red food Thermos in front of him, filled with some indefinable food. The quiet man ate something from a plastic container. The talker bent down towards the floor, and unpacked a plastic water bottle from his backpack. The bottle was filled with a dark, almost black substance. As he turned the plastic bottle top, the sound of carbonated gas escaping could be heard. My mother packed Coke, he said, surprised. Normally she doesn't like me eating too much sugar.

The significance of the above moments is that they touched that nerve, the urge to create a rendition of my heart being touched. The moments when I, to return once again to Baudelaire, have had "my part in every joy and every sorrow that circumstance reveals to me."[84] There is a sense of connectedness, or sometimes precisely a failed connectedness, prevalent in most of the scenarios that arrest me – between the protagonists in the scene, and also between me and what I view. The difference from when I make photographic portraits is that then I need an invitation to step in, to directly participate. I move from being a witness of something that wasn't intended to include me, to being one of the protagonists in the encounter that I set up in front of my camera.

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84. Baudelaire, 17.

So how does that feeling connect to my interest in portrait photography? Can writing down moments where something happened within me assist me in defining what it is, that elusive quality of connectedness I am looking for in my work? Help me move towards an understanding of the photographic encounter through the medium of language. In my next practice project I continued stripping away elements from the artistic expression, thinking through Georges Didi-Huberman's idea of the *rend*.

2.6.3 Practice III*, Down*

Site-specific HD projection, 10 minute loop, freestanding screen placed on floor of the basement of a disused fire station on 1 Chiltern Street, London, as part of the exhibition Breathing Space.[85]

A long, slow pan. Following seams, the lines in-between. Moving from the domestic interiors of the upper floors, off-limits to the exhibition audience, down, through the building, ending where the walls meet the rubberized basement floor in the former gym. The last pan follows an imaginary line in the wall hidden behind the projection screen. A series of vertical scans, as opposed to the more habitual horizontal scan of a room we undertake upon entering, the work attempts to evoke the closed-off space and those having occupied it.

The seams provide me with an in- or out– point. As the camera scans along, each incident becomes an event, each mark, stain, crack or screw arresting us. I am thinking of Didi-Huberman, and his ideas about the ground of certainty crumbling and anything becoming possible. "We are entering into a trance-like state, a dream space."[86] The point at which the surface has been violated allows us to enter into the image, establishing and connecting intimacy and distance. To grant face, to portray a surface. Is that to make a portrait of an inanimate building? Agamben claims that:

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85.   Curated by Rose LeJeune, 23rd of May until 15th of June 2008. A group of 7 consisting of artists, a dancer, an architect, and a composer did a residency in the empty building making work in response to the space.
86.   Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*. N edition, (University Park, Pa.: Penn State University Press, 2009), 148.

There is a face wherever something reaches the level of exposition and tries to grasp its own being exposed, wherever a being that appears sinks in that appearance and has to find a way out of it. (Thus, art can give a face even to an inanimate object, to a still nature.)[87]

Raymond Hains once said about his work, "My works existed before me, but nobody had seen them, because they were blindingly obvious."[88] Rather than what Hains did, however – appropriating pre-existing tableaux within the urban landscape and exhibiting them – I want to look at the overlooked. To enhance vision. To instil a sense of visual seduction as the camera pans slowly down cracks and seams, wallpaper unravelling. I become a scopic interpreter of signs inscribed in the building, looking for evidence of presence. Could it be called a kind of portraiture through metonymy, as Rosy Martin describes her process of photographing the house she grew up in?[89]

A sound of humming as one enters the installation creates a sense of confusion as to whether the sound that can be heard is part of the room or part of the building, perhaps originating somewhere behind the screen. Only when the first clip changes, and the pitch of the low humming subtly shifts, does it become clear that it is in fact part of the work. The sound, an electrical meter whirring, is intended as a marker of temporality, enhancing the time-based properties of the work. It also increases the sense that the spectator is moving through a space, towards the final point in the basement. Susan Stewart talks about the "silence of the ordinary"[90] in relation to the temporality of the everyday. At the same time "ongoing and reversible", and predictable and repetitive as pages falling off a calendar, the electrical meter whirring, steadily approaching higher and higher numbers. Stewart claims that this type of keeping count, or signifying, is drowned by the aforementioned silence of the ordinary. In this way our awareness of time passing is reinforced.[91]

Working in this way gave me a chance to catch my own breath, as it were. Making work through

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87. Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*. Translated by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 92.
88. Christopher Masters, "Raymond Hains." *The Guardian*, December 6, 2005.
89. Rosy Martin, "'Too close to Home? – an Exploration of a Specific Semi-Detached Suburban House.'" Visual Urbanism Conference, Goldsmiths University, 2008.
90. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. 10 edition, (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1992), 14.
91. Ibid., 14.

an empatic relation with others, strangers, come at a cost. Relating, mirroring, intense listening demands my energy, my full attention. The walls of an abandoned building are less exigent. Here I am allowed to look without having to relate, to answer. To show empathy or be privy to emotional contagion. Giving me freedom to make a work where I do not have to answer to the wishes of the person/persons portrayed. The walls do have an ability to invoke an empathic reaction in me, but they don't demand a response. In this way the work *Down* acts as a space, a chance to recover before the next piece.

I am thinking of the interior surface of a building in the same terms as the surface of the faces I normally work with. I recall a meeting with a very young infant, who, when I held him in my arms, reached out towards the openings in my face – mouth, nostrils – as if wanting to enter them. Then doing the reverse, opening his little mouth wide whilst facing my face, as if attempting to eat me, to make me enter through the hole in his face. The desire reappears, to breach the skin containing us, to connect inside and outside once more. In the following chapter I will look at how our insides and outsides are connected, within ourselves and to others, through an exploration of *empathy.*
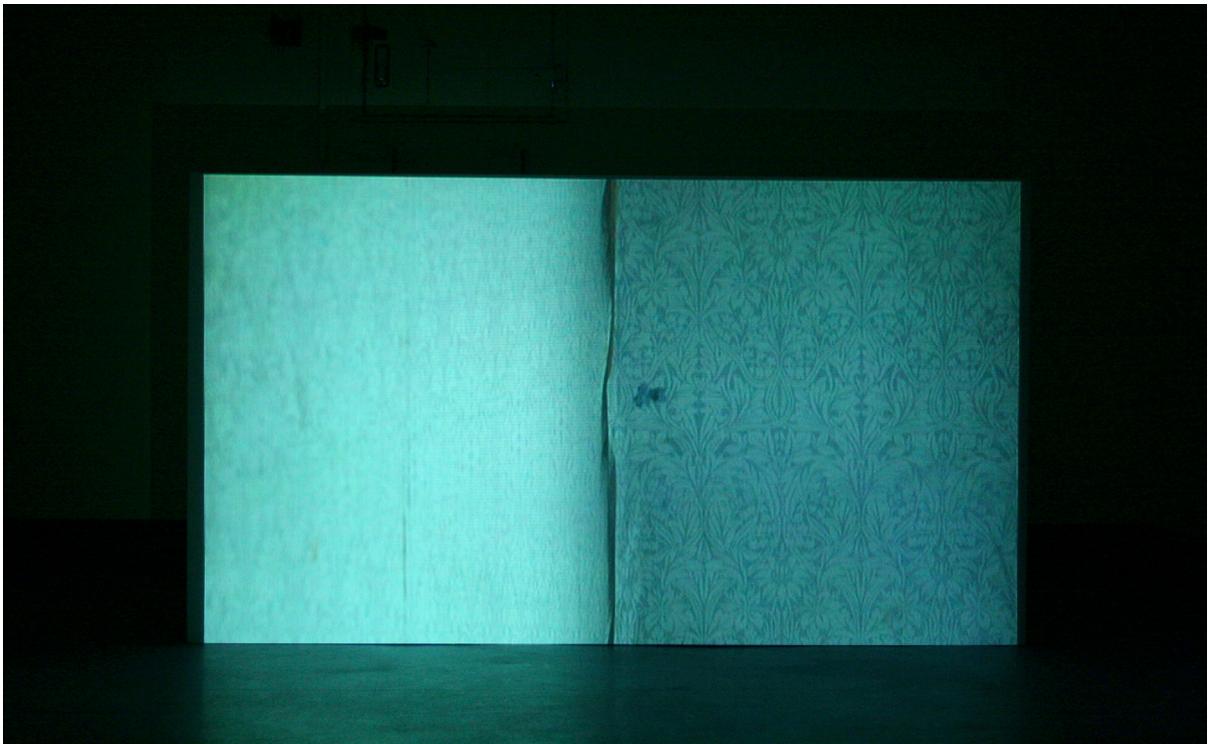
3. The Empathic Encounter

And I go to bed, proud to have lived and to have suffered in some one besides myself.

Charles Baudelaire[92]

Empathy has re-emerged as a topic of interest to researchers in a broad range of fields, and, alongside this, there has been new interest in phenomenology and early 20th-century thinking.[93] If the previous chapter helped define *empathy* as crucial for my desire to both look at and make photographic portraiture, I now want to explore whether some of the recent research in the field can tell me something of how I, as a photographer, interact with my subjects during the process of creating portraits? And, moreover, help me understand how and why we engage with lens-based representations of the human face? Interestingly enough, many researchers use visual stimuli – photographs or video clips – rather than real live faces, when investigating both empathy and face-to-face interaction.

I will start this chapter by giving a brief historical overview of the word *empathy*. I will then take a look at what phenomenology has to say about empathy, before exploring some current research. This has two strands – neuroscientific theories of mirror neurons and psychological research focusing on emotional contagion and facial mirroring.

Empathy is crucial both for the making and for the understanding of my practice. A scene which triggers an emotional engagement in one person can be met with total blankness from the person next to them. Just as Baudelaire, upon being touched by the sight of a poor family, turned to his lover, but, instead of seeing his own compassion reflected in her eyes, saw only annoyance and impatience that her view had been constricted.[94] But how can we define empathy? The concept

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92. Baudelaire, *Windows,* 76.
93. See See Karsten R Stueber, *Rediscovering Empathy*, (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2010) and Decety and Ickes 2009; Eisenberg and Strayner 1990, Davis 2008
94. Ibid, 84.

is both subjective and hypothetical[95] – an intangible phenomenon and therefore difficult to translate into a simple descriptive term. As we will see, the word *empathy* has, right from its inception, been used to evoke related yet distinct phenomena. Most researchers today, however, invoke it hoping it will provide answers to the question *How can one know what another person is thinking and feeling?* Some might also be interested in the follow-up question *What leads one person to respond with sensitivity and care to another?*[96] A useful contemporary definition of empathy can be borrowed from Jean Decety "the natural capacity to share, understand, and respond with care to the affective states of others".[97]

3.1 From Einfühlung to Empathy

Although the root of the term is Greek (ein+patein, to suffer), the term *empathy* is surprisingly recent, originally appearing as *Einfühlung* in the study of aesthetics in late 19th-century Germany. Interestingly enough, it first came into being to denote the transference of moods or feelings into a piece of art by the artist, or from a piece of art to the viewer. German philosopher Rober Vischer is credited with inventing the word, first written in his doctoral thesis 'On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics' in 1873. With the term *Einfühlung* ('feeling-in' or 'feeling-into'), Visher tried to describe the physical responses generated in the viewer by observing paintings or sculptures. He spoke of how certain forms awake a certain set of feelings in the viewer.[98] A dreamer's body "unconsciously projects its own bodily form – and with it also the soul – into the form of the object".

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95. Baaren, Decety, Djiksterhuis et al. *Being Imitated: Consequences of Nonconsciously Showing Empathy* in Decety, Jean, Decety and William Ickes, eds. *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*. (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2011), 41.

96. Daniel C Batson "These Things Called Empathy: Eight Related but Distinct Phenomena" in Jean Decety and William Ickes, eds. *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2011), 4.

97. Decety, Jean. Empathy: From Bench to Bedside. MIT Press, 2012. vii.

98. Robert Visher, R. (1873), 'Uber Das Optische Formgefühl: Ein Beiträg zur Ästethik, Gredner' quoted in David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese. "Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Esthetic Experience." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 11, no. 5 (May 2007)

He concludes: "From this I derived the notion that I call 'empathy' (*Einfühlung*)."[99] I would like to return to this original meaning of the term, describing embodied reactions to artworks, but also extend it towards the modern definition of empathy as an ability to understand and share emotional states of others. Can my empathic connection to the subjects of my work translate into an artwork that will allow the viewers to *feel-into* the work? Creating an empathic resonance that reverberates from the original encounter between photographer and subject, through to the represented moment, and finally coming to a halt in the viewer.

Supporting Visher's view, philosopher Theodore Lipps, professor at the University of Munich, picked up the term when describing the relationship between a work of art and the viewer. A person contemplating Goya's *The Horror of War*, for example, would, according to Lipps, be prone to feeling the pain of the contorted tortured body represented in the painting. Later, he extended the concept to include how we can intersubjectively understand each other, broadening the term from simply referring to the artwork–person dyad to encompass the person–person relationship, whereby direct observation of someone in pain will make me *feel myself in him (fühle mich so in ihm)*.[100]

Lipps went on to describe this feeling as bodily experience rather than rational, though. In 1907 he wrote an article where he argued that gestures and expressions show our emotions, but the relationship between what is felt and how it is shown is a particular one, much different, for example, from how smoke signals fire.[101] According to Lipps, we imitate expressions when we see them, and this act of mirroring or reproduction makes us partake in the emotions expressed by the gestures. This is something that comes by instinct for humans, he claimed, an instinct for empathy that involves dual drives: one directed towards imitation and one towards expression. The feeling evoked in myself by the expression I mirror, I re-attribute to the other through a process of projection, and in this way I reach an understanding of the other.

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99. Benjamin Morgan, "Critical Empathy: Vernon Lee's Aesthetics and the Origins of Close Reading," (October 17, 2014.) 4. https://www.academia.edu/3163737/Critical_Empathy_Vernon_Lees_Aesthetics_and_the_Origins_of_Close_Reading.

100. Theodore Lipps quoted in Vittorio Gallese, "The 'Shared Manifold' Hypothesis: From Mirror Neurons to Empathy." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8, no. 5–7 (2001), 43.

101. Theodore Lipps quoted in Dan Zahavi, "Empathy and Mirroring: Husserl and Gallese." In *Life, Subjectivity & Art*, edited by Roland Breeur and Ullrich Melle, 217–54. Phaenomenologica 201. Springer Netherlands, 2012. 222.

Described in these terms, empathy appears as a cumbersome process. No wonder, then, that Lipps saw empathy as limited. The only mental states we can infer from others are those we ourselves feel. We cannot detect or decode a feeling we ourselves have not felt. We are restricted by ourselves, as we need to use our own inner experience to move from what we see to what we feel.[102] I think of my own experience, particularly of tutoring students. Often there seems to be an inverse relation, where those most harsh and unforgiving towards themselves show greatest empathy for others. And, at the other end of the scale, are those acutely attuned to their own needs and emotions, demanding a space where their emotions will be accounted for and understood, but less able to give space to the emotions of others.

So, if feeling something yourself doesn't necessarily lead you to understanding the feelings of others, and we define empathy as that which leads us to understand the inner life of others, Lipp's description of the interpersonal process is perhaps more accurate for describing emotional contagion. Emotional contagion – coming to share the emotions of another person – is not simply a question of correctly recognizing the emotions of the other: the same emotions also need to fill the empathizer. Sometimes the occasions when a shared feeling occurs are referred to as instances of sympathy rather than empathy, a useful distinction to my mind.[103] We could also say that sympathy is more focused on the other's state as something that can be addressed and alleviated, whereas empathy is focused on understanding the other's subjective experience or state of mind.[104] Therefore, I believe empathy rather than sympathy is the correct term to describe the interaction between me and whoever stands before my lens, and the emotional connection between artwork and viewer.

So it follows that there are several reactive emotions that may come into play under the umbrella term empathy, and they are primarily divided by whether they are self- or other-oriented, or if they presuppose awareness between self and other. In the following section I will explore some phenomenological perspectives on the intersubjective meeting, which ties into the previous chapter on The Face.

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102. Ibid., 222-223
103. See Bateson, 6.
104. Lauren Wispé, "The Distinction between Sympathy and Empathy: To Call Forth a Concept, a Word Is Needed." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 50, no. 2 (1986), 314.

3.2 Phenomenological Perspectives on Empathy

Just like photographers use the camera as a filter between ourselves and lived experience, helping us to makes sense of the world, phenomenologists like Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty believe that we all use our bodies in our connection and communication with others. Husserl constructs empathy as a direct empirical experience, which allows us to gain access to another's consciousness.

> The other is given to me originally in empathy, for what I see is not a sign, not a mere analogue, but rather the other. If I talk with another, if I look him in the eyes, I have the liveliest experience of his immediate presence. I am justified in saying that I 'see him' qua person, and not merely qua body.[105]

The idea that we can see another person's consciousness, if you like, is a sentiment that is echoed in how many portrait photographers discuss their work. Being able to see the person, or, indeed, *capture the contained* through a photograph of their bodily form. And through this meeting between oneself and others we are, according to Husserl, able to encounter true transcendence, all the while the other always remaining absolutely other to me, as I do to him. The distinction between empathy and sympathy again, that of seeing, recognizing, experiencing, but always knowing what pertains to the other and what pertains to me.

Merleau-Ponty puts it beautifully in *The Phenomenology of Perception*:

> The sense of the other is not given, but understood, that is, recaptured by an act on the spectator's part. The whole difficulty is to conceive this act clearly without confusing it with a cognitive operation. The communication or comprehension of gestures comes about through the reciprocity of my intentions and the gestures of others, of my gestures and intentions discernible in the conduct of other people. It is as if the other person's intention inhabited my body and mine his. [106]

Perhaps it is here the magic of photography lies – in the ability of another person, another lived experience, to reach out through time and space and inhabit my body.

In the same way, Emmanuel Levinas sees the meeting with the other as embodied rather than cognitive. Lingis explains Levinas's position:

> The other … communicates not only the sense of his postures and gestures but also the sense of his

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105. Husserl quoted in Zahavi, 228
106. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception: An Introduction*. 2 edition. (London; New Maurice. York: Routledge, 2002), 215.

scowls, murmurs, sighs, utterances and coded words to me by ordering their reproduction in me, by ordering my body with his.[107]

But it is not a straightforward process – phenomenology describes the meeting with another as fundamentally contradictory. I see the other both as an object in the world and as a subject, with her own thoughts and perspective. We cannot separate that which is expressed from expression itself. Merleau-Ponty says about the lived body that it is "our expression in the world, the visible form of our intentions"[108] and we cannot get away from that being so – every use of our bodies *is* expression. When I smile, my smile is not separated from the joy I feel, but rather an integral part of it, or two different manifestations of the same phenomenon. But we can encounter expressions that seem insincere to us, empty or false. How do those kinds of expressions, characterized by a discrepancy between inner and outer, sit within this schema?

Lisa Folkmarsson Käll writes in relation to Merleau-Ponty's thoughts: "When I encounter a smiling face that does not seem to display joy, but rather, a lack thereof, I do not in fact only experience a discrepancy between inside and outside, but also an identity."[109] The empty smiling face comes to signify precisely the lack of joy, and therefore embodies the underlying feeling which eludes me. At the same time, this discrepancy and room for ambiguity between inside and outside indicates that the relationship between inner and outer expression is not a simple, direct one. Rather, there is an incessant interlacing and unfolding of what we like to place on the inside or the outside of the face. In this way, faces and their expressions confound us, at the same time as they remind us that the division between inside and outside is less clear than we would expect. And not only the division between inside and outside – in our relation to others we are "embodied and embedded in the world"[110], as we, from the very beginnings of life, come into being through our relationship with others. Therefore, we can never have pure subjectivity removed from others.

There is something here, in relation to photography. A thought about surface and depth that resonates. The surface of the print/the surface of the represented face – and what lies behind,

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107. Lingis, 128.
108. Merleau-Ponty, 5
109. Lisa Folkmarsson Käll, "Expressive Space: Encountering Self and Other," Centre for Gender Research, Uppsala university, n.d. 4. http://philosophy.columbian.gwu.edu/sites/philosophy.columbian.gwu.edu/files/image/Kall_gwu_presentation.pdf.
110 Ibid., 6.

hidden from view. But also what reaches out, and fills that gap between the viewer and the flat representation. Another interlacing and unfolding. But, although I can interpret the expressions on the reproduced face, I can never know the mind in its entirety, and it will constantly elude my grasp, or my full understanding.

I think back to August Sander and that most noble of ambitions for a portrait photographer: "to create pictures that reproduce the people concerned with unconditional veracity and reflect their whole psychology."[111] No, I am afraid we need to settle for less. Or? Perhaps not less. Just different. "In his flesh I see not only the anonymity and susceptibility of his want but the demanding insistence of his being." [112] Isn't this approaching what portraits do? Demanding to be acknowledged precisely on account of being – or having once been – alive? It reminds me of a strange medical case described by Merleau-Ponty, a man who constantly felt the need to turn around to check that the world remained there, behind his back .[113] Perhaps those of us afflicted by another strange compulsion – that of photographing the faces of strangers – similarly both *need* and *find* proof that the world around us exists when we find ourselves confronted with this insistence for recognition.

Hence, the phenomenologists see the intersubjective embodied meeting as fundamental for empathy. But how does that relate to current thinking within neuroscience and psychology? How compatible are they, and which can tell us more of how we interact with each other and with images? In the following section I will make use of multiple discourses investigating the process whereby we understand others.

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111. August Sander quoted in Regener, 52.
112.   Lingis, 138.
113.   Merleau-Ponty, 486.

3.3 Empathy Today

Lately there has been a renewed interest in the concept of empathy, led in part by advances in brain imaging technologies.[114]With the technological improvements within cognitive neuroscience, specifically the advent of fMRI scanning, the cognitive and affective processes that come into play when people experience empathy have begun to be traced within the human brain. From neuroscientists working with mirror neurons to psychologists working with emotion psychology, a wide variety of research projects have increased our understanding of empathy. Even though much remains to be discovered about our brains and the neural underpinnings of the way we connect with and interpret others, a window has been opened which allows us to begin to understand the process whereby we connect to and interact with other humans.

Empathy is a fundamental tool for humans, as much of our social life is based on our capacity to accurately detect emotional information transmitted by another person. Current research indicates that our empathic capacity is innate, and that already as toddlers we are able to extrapolate the intentions and feelings of others. In 1921 Sigmund Freud proposed that "A path leads from identification by way of imitation to empathy, that is to the comprehension of the mechanism by which we are enabled to take up any attitude at all towards another mental life."[115] It is not uncommon for a newborn child to start crying when she hears another baby cry, and babies commonly mirror the facial expressions of their caregivers. Adults also mimic facial expressions, even when interacting with photographs of happy or angry faces[116] and automatically mimic the postures and gestures of people with whom they interact. Such unconscious imitation tends to increase liking and bonding between individuals – serving as a kind of natural 'social glue.'[117]

114. See Karsten R Stueber, *Rediscovering Empathy*, (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2010)

115. Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and The Analysis of The Ego*, Translated by James Strachey, (2011), 108. http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/35877?msg=welcome_stranger.

116. Per Andréasson and Ulf Dimberg. "Emotional Empathy and Facial Feedback." Journal of Nonverbal Behavior 32, no. 4 (December 2008): 215–24. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10919-008-0052-z.

117. E Morsella, J.A. Bargh, J Decety and J.T Cacioppo "Unconscious Action Tendencies: Sources of "Un-integrated Action" in eds. John T Cacioppo and Jean Decety, *The Oxford Handbook of Social Neuroscience*. 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, 2011), 341.

I will return to research around mimicking processes further along, but first I will explore what is arguably the most important scientific theory of empathy to emerge over recent decades: mirror neurons. These findings are relatively recent and therefore still contested – some claim fMRI scans are no more able to generate correct data than physiognomy once was.[118] But, nonetheless, it is useful to explore the new theories around empathy and embodied interaction that have emerged over recent decades .

3.4 Mirror Neurons

Neurophysiologist Giacomo Rizzolatto and his team at the University of Parma discovered mirror neurons quite by chance in their laboratory during the 1990s, while conducting research on macaque monkeys. The researchers found that the same neurons fired in the monkeys' brains when they observed an action as when they executed the action. (For instance, picking up a nut, or watching a researcher pick up a nut.)[119] Subsequently, the same system was found in human brains,[120] a discovery sometimes called the most important since the isolation of DNA.[121]

I will not explain in detail *how* mirror neurons work from a biological perspective, nor exactly what parts of the brain are involved, as that level of biological detail will not add to how we understand making and viewing photographic portraits. I will instead give an overview of the knowledge generated by their discovery, and outline what, if any, insights into photographic portraiture that can be suggested as a result. Mirror neuron systems (MNS) are not confined to the domain of action (as in movement), but also encompass other aspects of intersubjectivity

118.   I notice that we still look towards images for finding out who we really are, but now they are scans of brains rather than photographs of faces. We have got used to seeing articles on a wide range of topics illustrated by images of dark brains with yellow, green and red illuminated blotches, images used as proof. But how do we know how to interpret them? I remain wary of neurobabble: popular science that tends to present complex questions as a compelling and neatly narrated story.

119.   Giacomo Rizzolatti and Corrado Sinigaglia, "The Functional Role of the Parieto-Frontal Mirror Circuit: Interpretations and Misinterpretations." Nature Neuroscience 11, no. April 2010.

120.   Research on birds shows that they also have mirror neurons, but it is not known yet which other species they may exist in.

121.   V.S Ramachandran, "Mirror Neurons and Imitation Learning as the Driving Force behind 'the Great Leap Forward' in Human Evolution." From the Third Culture: http://www .edge.or g/3rd_culture/, n.d.

such as emotions and sensations. In short, they link action execution and action perception in our brains. It seems to be a process whereby one individual can understand the actions of another individual from inside his own body, as it were, and gives the observing individual a first-person grasp of the motor goals and intentions of another individual.[122]

This is fascinating to consider when thinking about gladiator games, public executions and the like. Do we empathise with the executioner or the executed? What about violent films? Perhaps it is not uncommon among highly sensitive people to find it unbearable to watch this kind of material. Here, an article written by a mathematician behind one of the UK's most popular dating sites comes to mind. They found that the factor that most closely predicted the chances for long-term happiness of couples that had been matched on their website was whether they answered identically the question "do you enjoy scary movies?" – 75% of long-term couples answered the same way, despite the question statistically splitting their user group in half.[123] Perhaps how we respond to violent stimuli says something about deeper levels of our personality, and our ability to feel empathy.

In the same way, mirror neurons have been shown to respond to actions that look as if they are about to be executed. Therefore, they can be said to help us understand others' implied actions, even in those instances when we do not see them being carried out.[124] According to neurophysicist Vittorio Gallese, "I understand the action of the other because it is an action I could perform myself."[125] Gallese goes on to claim that a wide range of interpersonal relations depend on automatic or embodied knowledge. We don't just see others, what they do and their displayed emotions, we also receive an internal representation of the body states linked to the other's actions and emotions, just as if we were performing a similar action ourselves. The motor system is active in the same area, both when we act and when we watch someone else acting. Only parts of our brain are connected to others in this way, however. A subset of mirror neurons inhibits our feelings, for instance feelings of sadness when we observe someone else displaying

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122. Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia, 264.
123. Christian Rudder, "Seven Secrets of Dating from the Experts at OkCupid." *The Guardian*, September 28, 2014, sec. Life and style. http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/sep/28/seven-secrets-of-dating-from-the-experts-at-okcupid.
124. Freedberg and Gallese, 200.
125. Vittorio Gallese, "The 'Shared Manifold' Hypothesis: From Mirror Neurons to Empathy." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8, no. 5–7 (2001), 36.

sad expressions. "I share the emotion but I don't feel it."[126] The same occurs when we see the body of someone else being touched. In this way we can share actions, intentions, feelings and emotions with others, which in turn gives us an understanding of the mental state of others.[127]

Embodied simulation, then, is beginning to take form as a discourse around empathy within the field of neuroscience, headed by Gallese and Rizzolatti. But how much can mirror-resonance mechanisms really explain? Is mirror-resonance merely the basis for interpersonal understanding and empathy, or does it explain the phenomenon in its entirety? Borg and Jacob both propose that, while mirror-neurons help us understand the other's motor intentions, they do not help us understand why the other made a movement, i.e. the prior intentions.[128] For instance, while mirror neurons might be able to tell us that the person in front of us is trying to grab a pen, they cannot tell us why the person is trying to grab the pen.

All in all, it seems that we cannot at this early stage determine how much and exactly what mirror neurons can explain in terms of empathy. It is possible there needs to be some kind of mentalizing skill for empathy to function properly. (As opposed to the 'automatic' knowledge garnered through embodied simulation.) Gallese, Rizzolatti and Keysers go as far as defining empathy as always involving a form of embodied simulation, and claims that empathy therefore gives us direct access to the subjectivity of the other in a non-conscious manner:

> When we read fiction or see a movie or a play or even when we see a painting, we map these fictional beings' actions, emotions and sensations onto our brain's visceral motor and sensory representations that account for our emotional experience, which comes before our cognitive experience.[129]

Marco Iacobini, professor of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences at UCLA, sums up the research on mirror neurons with the statement that their discovery seems to explain why phenomenologists were correct in their model of empathy.[130] Because of a shared bodily representational format, we map the actions of others onto our own motor representations, as well as others' sensations

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126. Vittorio Gallese:*"From Mirror Neurons to Embodied Simulation" Part 1*, 2012. Lecture at the Arnold Pfeffer Centre for Neuropsychoanalysis at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute.
127. Gallese, 2001. 44-45.
128. Zahavi, 246.
129. Vittorio Gallese, Christian Keysers, and Giacomo Rizzolatti. "A Unifying View of the Basis of Social Cognition." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 8, no. 9 (September 2004), 396.
130. Marco Iacoboni, *Mirroring People: The Science of Empathy and How We Connect with Others.* Original edition, (New York, N.Y.: Picador, 2009), 262.

and emotions onto our own motor representations. The ensuing intercorporeality describes a crucial aspect of intersubjectivity. Iacobini goes onto say that "the mirroring and the mirrored are always linked in a reciprocal situation"[131], a quote that brings both Levinas and Merleau-Ponty to mind, and perhaps phenomenology lies beneath the neuroscience of empathy like a shadow, influencing how leading proponents of mirror neurons conceptualize their discoveries.

Consequently, just as Levinas and Merleau-Ponty resonate strongly within my art practice, so do theories of mirror neurons and what they can suggest both in terms of understanding our responses to photographic portraits, and to the portraiture situation. Can mirror-neurons suggest answers as to why photographic portraits are such powerful communicators? In the next chapter I will look at some research investigating mirror neurons in relation to viewing artworks.

3.4.1 Art and Mirror Neurons

If theories of mirror neurons are correct, we systematically use our bodies as a kind of filter through which we attempt to make sense of the world, and the worlds of *others*. Aesthetic experiences can be characterized as a form of intersubjectivity, mediated through the work of the artist.[132] Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio has shown how our feelings (the conscious awareness of emotions) are connected with our bodies through what he calls an 'as-if body loop', whereby different areas in observers' brains react by assuming the same state they would have had if the observers of actions or emotions had been engaged in the same action, or if they had been put in the same situations that they observed.[133] For example, when we observe a painting or photograph that scares us, we don't run away, but our brain simulates or reproduces the somatic states seen in the image as if we were really present in the scene.

This manifold relationship between image and beholder is something Gallese has explored further, together with renowned art historian David Freedberg.

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131. Quoted by Gallese, 2012:1
132. Freedberg and Gallese, 200-203.
133. Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. (London: Vintage, 2006)

They propose that viewing both the world and artworks is a highly complex process, as it involves a "multi-modal notion of vision"[134] involving many different areas of our brain, rather than the activation of simply 'the visual part'. Just like Damasio, they believe that we react to images just as we react to the world around us. Even though these mechanisms may be socioculturally modulated, in essence they are universal, so understanding our embodied reaction to images can therefore help us understand how they affect us – everyday imagery as well as works of art. This is perhaps especially poignant today, when visual communication through still and moving images becomes more and more central online and in much-used mobile messaging applications.

David Freedberg co-operated with a team of neuroscientists on a specific study exploring neural reactions to viewing 'slashed' abstract paintings by Lucio Fontana. Their result was that the cuts elicited a different motor reaction within the subject's brain than the test image consisting simply of lines replacing the cut. The consistent result showed an embodied aspect to the aesthetic experience in the subjects. "The cuts on the canvas are the visible traces of goal-directed movements, hence capable of activating the relevant motor areas in the observers' brains."[135] With relevant movements, the scientists refer to the kind of actions you would need to physically slash a canvas with a knife. In this way "the artwork becomes the mediator of the motor and emotional resonance arising between the artist and observer."[136] It makes the beholder *feel* that which is beheld in an embodied, non-verbal manner. Therefore, Gallese and Freedberg posit that embodied simulation plays a vital role in our interest and appreciation of art.

As a visual artist I find these ideas utterly compelling. Decisions intuitively made in the studio or in the cutting room, impossible to verbalize in other ways than 'it looks right', seen through the eyes of embodied simulation take on a heightened meaning. (Here I would like to include a reservation. Will this intuitive working process gain from my increased knowledge of how the human brain works? Can neuroscience aid the creation of compelling art? Or will it simply, as some fear, explain away the magic we feel when faced with a great work of art?)

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134. Vittorio Gallese: *Warburg Symposium - Day 1 - Neuroesthetics*, 2013. Lecture at the Helix Centre, New York.
135. Alessandra M. Umilta', Cristina Berchio, Mariateresa Sestito, David Freedberg, and Vittorio Gallese. "Abstract Art and Cortical Motor Activation: An EEG Study." Frontiers in Human Neuroscience 6 (November 16, 2012).
136. Vittorio Gallese *"The Body in Aesthetic Experience: A Neuroscientific Perspective,"* 2012. Lecture at the Centre for Sciene, Technology , Medicine & Society at Berkley University, USA.

Freedberg and Gallese's theories are also relevant to consider in relation to footage or photographs of inanimate objects. They claim that:

> The observation of static graspable objects activates not only visual areas of the brain but also motor areas that control object-related actions such as grasping. The observation of graspable objects leads to the simulation of the motor act that the object affords. This implies that the same neuron not only codes the execution of motor acts but also responds to the visual features that trigger them, even in the absence of movement.[137]

Experiments have shown through brain imaging that watching manipulable objects like tools, fruit, vegetables, clothes and, yes, even sexual organs activates the region of our brain normally associated with executive functioning (control of action) and not with the representation of objects.[138] Does this in part hold the key to why visual representation of sexual acts, as in porn, can be so gratifying that humans risk becoming addicted? And why watching Nigella dip her finger into batter and then lick it gives us enough satisfaction to keep tuning into her cookery programmes? "When we see the body part of someone else being touched or caressed or when we see two objects touching each other, our somatosensory cortices are activated as if our body were subject to tactile stimulation."[139]

Fig IV

Fig IV   Juliane Eirich, *Towel,* Itoshima, Japan, 2011

137. Freedberg and Gallese, 200.
138. Ibid.
139. Ibid., 201.

When viewing the bright yellow towel from German photographer Juliane Eirich's *Itoshima* series, I imagine reaching out and touching the soft, warm fabric suspended from a hook on a nondescript domestic wall. It feels as if it's waiting for me too to reach out, dry my hands and body on its fluffy material, and envelop myself into its warm yellow glow. Would an image like this be as visually arresting if mirror neurons were not at play? Motor stimulation not triggered? Empathy as it was first conceived, *Einfühlung?*

Gallese has put forward an as-of-yet untested discourse on why embodied meetings with works of art are often more compelling than real life. He means that in our meeting with artworks we are able to leave reality behind for a moment, and in this way liberate more brainpower for the artistic experience. The result is a stronger reaction than we would gain from an experience sited in 'reality.'[140] Georg Simmel's description of the face-to- face meeting comes to mind.

> The extremely lively interaction into which the look from one eye to another weaves people together does not crystallize in any objective structure, but rather the unity that it creates between them remains directly suspended in the event and in the function. And this connection is so strong and delicate that it can only be supported by the shortest line – the straight line between the eyes – and the smallest deviation from this line, the slightest sideways glance, destroys the uniqueness of this connection completely. [141]

Thinking back to what I wrote about looking earlier, it is not often we can or dare keep up this kind of intense visual exchange in 'real life'. Even if we use our cameras as an alibi. That straight line is easier to achieve in interaction with a photograph or filmed face, when only the ending of the clip (for a moving image example) could disturb the direct eye-to-eye interchange. I also think of the process of returning – of looking again. In real-life, moments of face-to-face interaction are so fleeting – did I really see…? Wasn't there a glimmer of…? I can retain the memory of an encounter with the real, live face of another, a memory I can revisit through writing, for instance. But it is not static, it is slippery – ever-changing. And writing it does not seem to conjure up the same level of embodiedness in my response. More reflective, yes, but less situated. To the photograph, however, I can return again and again, each time feeling it as if for the first time. Those looks that have met mine emanating from a represented face rather than a real-life person are therefore easier to invoke. Clearer, more defined. Like so much in artistic creation, a process of reduction, a densification of that lively interaction, to paraphrase Simmel, taking place in

140. Vittorio Gallese, *"The Body in Aesthetic Experience: A Neuroscientific Perspective,"* 2012.
141. Simmel, 111-112.

face-to-face meetings. But can they really contain reciprocity, you might ask, those immobile eyes of a portrait? Yes, I believe they can, and I take note of the fact that most experiments on empathy and face-to-face interaction use photographs or moving image as stimuli, rather than actual faces. For practical reasons, no doubt – the encounter between two persons is too slippery to be rendered statistically valid – but it points towards a confidence in the power of images to test our relation to the face and to each other.

In addition, encounters with the other through art help us maintain concentration, like Gallese suggests, calling it "liberated embodied simulation", where we can be more open to the experience as we are able to leave our defensive mechanisms behind, considering we spatially tend to be still, or rather still (sitting in an audience, looking at a book, walking through a gallery). We feel safe, as there is a distance between the artworks and ourselves. Another reason we can allocate more bodily resources towards the processing of what we are beholding. Perhaps we could say that the densification occurs on both sides of the interchange between viewer and artwork. Can this help us understand why we feel connected to photographs? Could it be, when Rineke Djikstra and August Sander speak of revealing a truth in their sitters, that they are instead engaging in an intersubjective embodied mirroring and therefore able to depict a moment of connection to the other? But if this is the case, why is it that certain photographers and artists consistently manage to create photographs that make me feel an embodied reaction to them, whilst the work of others, with a similar subject matter, leaves me only able to appreciate them from a technical point of view?

Despite there being very little neuroscientific research into the individual differences in how the embodied neural networks operate in different individuals, Gallese claims to have found that the brains of more "inward types" of people indicate that they both understand and feel when they observe another, whereas other, more external types can recognize feelings well but will not share them.[142] A few different researchers have found a connection between high scores on the Davis Interpersonal Reactivity Index and stronger mirror neuron activity.[143] Developmental psychologist Mirella Dapretto and her team found compelling evidence that children's emotional

142. Gallese Vittorio, *"The Body in Aesthetic Experience: A Neuroscientific Perspective,"* 2012.
143. Claus C. Lamm, Daniel Batson, and Jean Decety, "The Neural Substrate of Human Empathy: Effects of Perspective-Taking and Cognitive Appraisal." *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 19, no. 1, 46.

empathy scores (measured through a questionnaire completed by the parents) and their activity in mirror neuron areas during the observation of facial emotional expressions are connected. The more empathic the child, the more mirror neurons would become activated. They also showed stronger activation of mirror neurons when they were imitating the facial expressions of others.[144]

If our propensity for sharing the feelings of others can be mapped on a graph, people suffering from mirror-touch synaesthesia would be found right on the outer edge. Mirror-synaesthetes are individuals who can feel touch occurring between other people on their own body by just looking.[145] They also show a much higher activation of mirror neurons, and score very highly on empathy tests. This supports the hypothesis that we empathise with others through a process of simulation. It also indicates big individual differences in the mirror neuron systems of different individuals.[146]

Accounts of the heroic behaviour of certain individuals at Utøya, the Norwegian island where 77 young people were massacred by Anders Behring Breivik, come to mind: Henrik Rasmussen, observing a young girl being shot in the shoulder when trying to escape the attack by swimming towards the mainland, and seeing the sharpshooter reload and take aim once again, screamed out from his hiding place. In this way he diverted Breivik's attention enough so that the shooter did not fire another bullet into the body of the bleeding and desperate girl, but in the process he enabled Breivik's shotgun to focus on himself, instead. As a result, Henrik was killed, and the young girl survived.[147]

It makes me wonder if the young man was so empathically connected with the bleeding girl in the water that he would do anything for a bullet not to hit her body again, effectively sacrificing himself in the process.

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144. Mirella Dapretto, Mari S. Davies, Jennifer H. Pfeifer, Ashley A. Scott, Marian Sigman, Susan Y. Bookheimer, and Marco Iacoboni. "Understanding Emotions in Others: Mirror Neuron Dysfunction in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders." *Nature Neuroscience* 9, no. 1 (January 2006): 28–30.

145. See Siri Hustvelt's account of living with mirror-touch synaesthesia in *The Shaking Woman or A History of My Nerves*, Picador, New York (2010).

146. Michael J Banissy and Jamie Ward. "Mirror-Touch Synesthesia Is Linked with Empathy." *Nature Neuroscience* 10, no. 7 (July 2007): 815–16.

147. Wenche Fuglehaug, "Heltedod." *Aftonposten*. July 19, 2014, sec. 1.

Despite science and philosophy seeming to converge, the existence of mirror neurons is by no means uncontroversial. Various researchers have not been able to find evidence for mirror neurons in humans.[148] I am in no position to verify or dispute scientific theories, but, as thinking around mirror neurons resonates with my own experience of both viewing and making art, and my thinking through of meetings between myself and others, I do believe the existence of mirror neurons proposes a compelling theory of intersubjectivity. Even if it was proven to be wrong, or at best an oversimplification, in 20 years' time, it has brought the discourse around empathy and embodied interaction to the surface.

Two complementary but different propositions have been put forward by proponents of mirror neurons – that they help us understand what the other is feeling and make us share that feeling. Gallese is in one respect very clear that mirror neurons do *not* engender feelings of sympathy, i.e. feeling it yourself, but having read extensively on mirror neurons I consider that the differentiation between the two still seems vague. *If* individuals with mirror synaesthesia, who score very highly on empathy scores *and* have been found to have overactive mirror neurons can be called 'super-empaths', surely mirror neurons ought to have something to do with also *feeling* the pain of the other. Gallese's anecdotal observations on the differences he has come across in the brains of introverts versus extroverts in terms of *recognizing* and *feeling,* in conjunction with Dapretto's research on children, seem to point towards large individual differences in our brains. Our particular brain-make-up, if you like, would surely then affect both how we *make* art involving others, and how receptive we are as *audience* for artworks. In the following chapter I will look at some other theories regarding human–human interaction, specifically emotional contagion. Not simply recognizing the emotion of the other, but also coming to feel as the other does. I will move from what happens inside our brain to the outside, the face; from neuroscience to social psychology, looking at some of the most cited research within human interaction studies.

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148. Angelika Lingnau, Benno Gesierich, and Alfonso Caramazza. "Asymmetric fMRI Adaptation Reveals No Evidence for Mirror Neurons in Humans." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 106, no. 24 (June 16, 2009): 9925–30.

3.5 Empathy and Emotions

We are made through others.

Siri Hustveldt[149]

Both human beings and our closest animal relations have been given a specialized organ, our face, to convey our feelings and emotions to those surrounding us. Recognizing and correctly interpreting emotion is very important, both as a tool for understanding and making sense of the behaviour of others, and also because it enables us to understand the impact on others of our own behaviour, providing us with a mirror, in a sense, in which we can see our own behaviour. [150]

Emotion recognition, according to social scientists Ralph Adolphs and Vanessa Janowski, can be defined as a series of processes whereby we attempt to reconstruct the inner workings of another being. In order to do so we use a series of clues available to us: tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, actions and other contextual and historical information we are party to. Adolphs and Janowski define emotion recognition as a highly active process. A series of interactive behaviours underpin our ability to recognize emotion in others, from probing the other with a glance and then registering their response, to directly asking a question.[151] Neuroscientific research, on the other hand, has a tendency to be unidirectional in scope, content with tracking the neurological processes in only one of the parties in interpersonal meetings. This is no doubt largely down to how studies tend to be set up. But it is an important area to research in the future, and, of course, very much relevant for what happens within the photographic meeting, where two people interact. (Currently, most of the existing research is closer to the relationship and emotional contagion happening between a photographic portrait and a viewer.)

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149. Siri Hustvedt, *The Shaking Woman or A History of My Nerves*, (New York: Picador, 2010), 92.
150. Ralph Adolphs and Vanessa Janowski *Emotion Recognition* in Decety, Jean, and John T. Cacioppo. *The Oxford Handbook of Social Neuroscience*. 1 edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 252.
151. Ibid.

3.6 Mimicry/Facial Feedback Hypothesis

Humans' tendency to mimic each other and automatically synchronize postures, expressions, vocalizations and even emotions has been termed emotional contagion.[152] Thinking around the reciprocal emotional influence of one person on another has run parallel to the development of the empathy concept,[153] but let's try to consider the difference between the two. Whereas empathy is the ability to understand another's subjective experience or state of mind, whilst remaining in one's own perspective, as I wrote earlier, emotional contagion implies that our own perspective changes. Our emotional state shifts as a direct result of observing the emotional state of another. (Is emotional contagion something that happens more before the camera, I wonder? Whereas empathy is more apt for describing the relationship between artwork and viewer?)

In 1872 Charles Darwin published *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. (A book all of us interested in the history of photography and portraiture know well thanks to the photographic illustrations created by Duchenne de Boulogne and Oscar Rejlander. But that is another story.) Darwin proposed that emotional experience is directly influenced by feedback from the facial muscles. If we freely express our emotions, they will be intensified, whereas supressing the outwards manifestation of our emotions will soften them. So, if you express violent gestures your rage will increase; if you show signs of fear you will become more afraid; and, finally, "he who remains passive when overwhelmed with grief loses his best chance of recovering elasticity of mind."[154] A viewpoint shared by many of his time and culture, no doubt, embedded in the ideal of the British stiff upper lip.

Psychologist James Laird tested Darwin's hypothesis in an experiment whereby subjects were told that facial muscle activity was to be measured. Their faces were fitted with electrodes and then rearranged to mimic naturally occurring facial expressions, much like Duchenne de

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152. Elaine Hatfield, John T. Cacioppo and Richard L Rapson *Emotional Contagion*. (Cambridge England; New York: Paris: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 97.
153. An early proponent of a theory of emotional contagion was economic philosopher Adam Smith, noting that, as people imagined themselves in another's situation, they displayed motor mimicry. Later, Theodor Lipps claimed that observation of emotional displays led to mimicry, and furthermore that a feedback process created a convergence between observed and felt emotional states.
154. Charles Darwin *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 365.

Boulogne once arranged his subjects. Afterwards, the subjects were asked how they felt during the experiment. One man answered:

> When my jaw was clenched and my brows down, I tried not to be angry but it just fit the position. I'm not in any angry mood but I found my thoughts wandering to things that made me angry, which is sort of silly I guess. I knew I was in an experiment and knew I had no reason to feel that way, but I just lost control.[155]

This seems to indicate that facial feedback between expressions and felt emotions do occur. So what does that mean for portraiture, and my work? I don't ask my subjects to take on a particular expression. Nonetheless, it becomes interesting in relation to the mirroring that occurs in interpersonal relationships. As we know, infants begin to mimic their caregivers shortly after birth, and continue to do so throughout their lifetime. This process is incredibly fast; research on college students found that the students could synchronize their movements within 21 milliseconds (the time of one picture frame).[156] This strongly indicates a non-conscious, embodied synchronization.[157]

We also know that people have variable ability to express emotions facially.[158] Researchers have noted a marked difference in emotional expressivity between extroverts and introverts. Extroverts have been shown to be more emotionally expressive, and in a study by Buck, Miller and Caul effective emotional senders were identified as having a set of characteristics in common which set them apart from poor emotional senders. Compellingly, whilst having a rich emotional language and expressive faces, they were not found to have strong internal affection of the chosen stimuli (pictures of happy children, burned and disfigured bodies etcetera). This was measured by heart rate and electro-dermal responses. Introverts, or poor emotional senders, on the other hand were unwilling or unable to show how they were being affected by the images, but heart rate and dermal responses showed a powerful embodied reaction to the slides.[159] I note that what seems to have been most highly valued by the researchers in 1974 (*effective* sender versus *poor* sender) is perhaps an indication to the low status of empathy at the time.

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155. James Laird "The Real Role of Facial Response in the Experience of Emotion." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 47 (1984), 480.
156. Hatfield, Cacioppo and Rapson, 97.
157. Ibid., 38.
158. Ibid., 55.
159. Buck, Miller and Caul quoted in Hatfield and Cacioppo, 107.

I will move forward in time, but stay in the field of social psychology. Elaine Hatfield, John Cacioppo and Richard Rapson have more recently attempted to map out individual differences in regards to emotional contagion. They made the following statements about individuals likely to be afflicted by emotional contagion:

- Rivet their attention on others
- Construe themselves in terms of their interrelatedness to others
- Are able to read each other's emotional expressions, voices, gestures, and postures
- Tend to mimic facial, vocal and postural expressions
- Are emotionally reactive[160]

For me it resonates as a more accurate description than the generic term 'introvert', as social behaviour indicating introversion or extroversion in a popular psychology sense to me seems highly socially constructed, and certainly not measurable by how talkative or socially adept someone is. Again, like Buck, Miller and Caul they propose that different people have differing ability to infect others with their feelings. What they term *Typhoid Marys* possess a natural tendency to infect others with their moods and emotional states, while others, whom they term the *Marcel Prousts* (or Baudelaires, to my mind), are especially vulnerable to emotional contagion.[161]

If I try to translate this to portrait photography, the Typhoid Marys of the photography world can be represented by a photographer like Richard Avedon, known for his bullish attitude towards his subjects. He said:

> A portrait photographer depends upon another person to complete his picture. The subject imagined, which in a sense is me, must be discovered in someone else willing to take part in a fiction he cannot possibly know about. My concerns are not his. We have separate ambitions for the image. His need to plead his case probably goes as deep as my need to plead mine, but the control is with me.[162]

A very eloquent rendition of the dynamics at play where a Typhoid Mary photographer engages in a face-to-face encounter with his subject. In contrast with Avedon, I choose August Sander as my Proustian portrait photographer. His work speaks of great sensitivity towards his subjects, and his son has described the particular humility with which Sander engaged the subjects of his

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160. Hatfield, Cacioppo and Rapson, 128.
161. Ibid.
162. Richard Avedon quoted in Richard Bolton, ed. *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*. (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1992), 267.

work, regardless of who they were or their social station.[163] There is no uniform way that his subjects face the camera; rather, one gets a sense of the multitude of characters that make up humanity. Comparing Sander's *People of the 20th Century* with Avedon's *In the American West,* superficially projects with a common ground or methodology, the difference in my reactions to the various portraits is palpable.

Most of Avedon's subjects look either uncomfortable or defiant. They are different subjectivities, but as I flick through the pages they start bleeding into one, common character. They begin to approach caricature. Sander's work, on the other hand, gives me a sense of engagement, almost of love for humanity in all its multifaceted forms. The people portrayed communicate with me, the viewer, as individuals, with their own subjectivities. Some touch me more deeply than others. I feel a warmth in the look, that original exchange between photographer and subject that I now get to partake in. A warmth absent in the photographs by Avedon.[164]
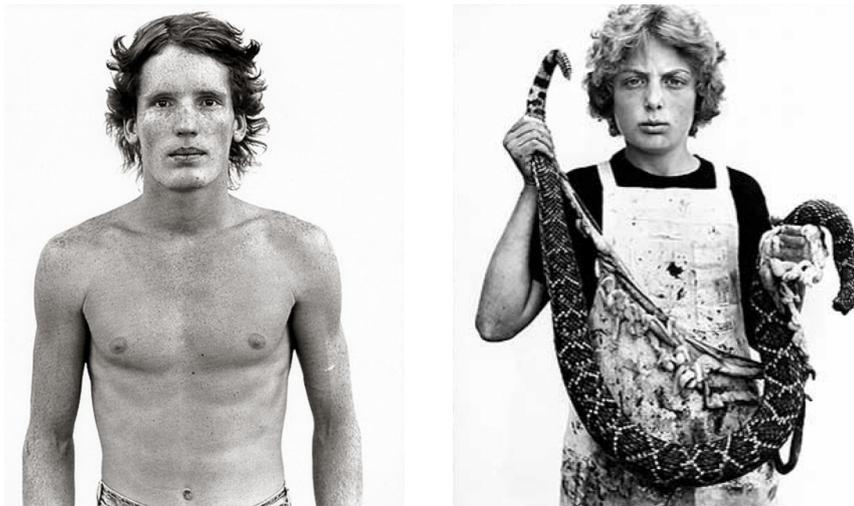

Fig V

Fig V   Left: Richard Avedon, *Boyd Fortin, 13 years old,* 1983
           Right: Richard Avedon, *Jay Green, Grain Thresher, Idaho,* 1983

163.   "August Sander - People of the 20th Century" directed by Reiner Holzemer. (Reiner Holzemer Film, 2002)

164.   Am I free to choose how to approach my own subjects? Can I take on a *Proustian* role here, a *Typhoid Mary* approach there? If the research around mirror neurons and emotional contagion are right, then I am limited by my own personality in the way that I engage with the subjects in front of my camera. In addition, my personality probably influences the kind of work that resonates most deeply with me, so it will come as no surprise to you that I am not unlike the description above of people easily affected by emotional contagion.

Looking at the two images of Avedon's above, I am struck by the similarity in facial expressions. Set jaws, lips pressed together, the subject is confronting the camera, facing it head on, sizing it up. The boy carrying the gutted snake holds it up in-between himself and the camera, and I wonder if it has been killed for the benefit of photographer, and in extension, for me, the viewer. I look at them as *other,* there in front of the camera, and both seem to have been caught on an inhalation. Breathing in air rather than exhaling/ingesting the emotions of the Typhoid Mary photographer who stands in front of them.

Fig V1

August Sander's young farmers, then? Are their expressions not similar, too? No, for me there is a difference in how they look back at us, and I have always been caught by the look of the last man in particular. Turning his head back to look at the photographer and us, his eyes seem to pierce me, bear straight into me. I posit that the photographer/receiver, the Proustian practitioner, will easily pick up the emotions of the persons in front of the camera, and mirror their emotional content back at them, effectively increasing whatever emotion happens to be present in the subject. This works as a *densifying* of the emotional content, where the back-and-forth face-to-face encounter between subject and photographer is like cranking up the emotional stakes, as it were, making what was already present more concentrated. In the work of the Typhoid Mary photographer, on the other hand (characterized by feeling and expressing strong emotions and being relatively insensitive or unresponsive to those around them who are expressing other emotions)[165], the expressions of the persons photographed will be more a reflection of their

Fig VI   August Sander, *Jungbauern,* 1914
165. Hatfield, Cacioppo and Rapson, 130.

own selves than anything else. There is nothing inherently wrong with that – to create a kind of self-portrait using the faces of others, like Avedon purports to do, can be an interesting and worthwhile artistic method. But it does not interest me as a working method, and I believe the emotional content of those images is less strong.

What about other portrait photographers? I remember seeing a large retrospective of Pieter Hugo's work recently;[166] walking around the vast exhibition space left me disconnected – as I was walking through a museum exhibit filled with disembodied objects. People were connected not because of *who* they were, but *what.* But come to think of it, that is not the problem. Rineke Djikstra, often hailed as the heir to Sander, can also at times pick subjects by virtue of what they are. But then, in the meeting, something seems to happen, so that in the resulting photographic portraits the individuals' subjectivity always breaks through. Soldiers are not merely there to display the uniform they wear; if anything, what superficially might appear to be the most interesting about them is quickly supplanted by a feeling of being confronted with another existence. I think of Charles Fregér, who produces similar series to both Djikstra and Hugo, and again a collection of objects comes to mind. The subjects continue as figures, they don't manage to transition from *what* to *who.* So when I, as a viewer, confront Hugo's and Fregér's photographic portraits, technically immaculate, shot with a similar camera and presented on a comparable scale to Djikstra's work, my body remains mute.

Fig VII

Fig VII   Rineke Dijkstra, *Vila Franca de Xira, Portugal, May 8, 1994*
166. At Fotografiska, a large private photography institution in Stockholm, 2014.

It does not vibrate, the embodied resonance in me is absent. It takes a Proustian, it seems, for that to happen.

When thinking of face-to-face interaction, emotional senders versus receivers, and what role the subject is given, performance artist Marina Abramovic's work at the Museum of Modern Art, *The Artist is Present,* also comes to mind. During a daily performance lasting as long as the museum was open, the artist sat on a chair facing a spectator, at either end of a space measuring a few metres in diameter, with more museum visitors queuing up around the square, waiting for their chance to occupy the chair opposite the famous artist. Big softbox lights were set up in all four corners, generating perfect studio lighting. The artist never stood, took a toilet break or consumed any food or drink for as long as the museum was open. The spectators could choose freely how long they occupied the chair in front of the artist, with durations lasting between a few minutes and many hours. A photographer was always on hand, documenting both the artist's and the spectators' faces, as the meetings between the pairs were taking place.[167] The resulting photographs were published on a dedicated MoMa-run Flickr page, and subsequently a book and a documentary were made. In all there was an emphasis on showing moments when the spectator-subjects looked sad or started crying when facing the countenance of Abramovic.
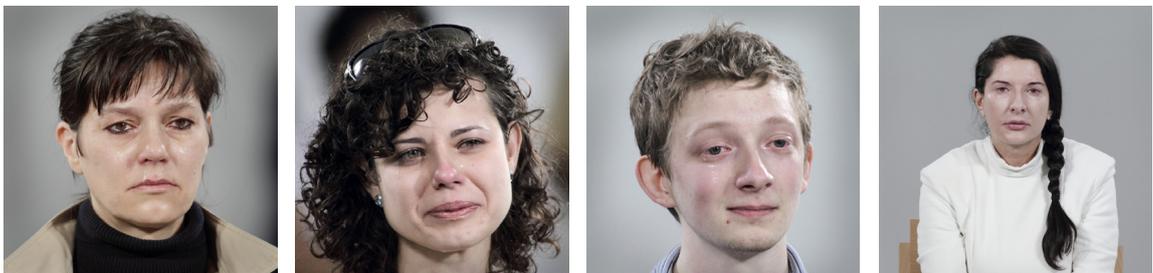

Fig VIII

Fig VIII   Top right: Marco Anelli, *Day 3, Portrait 2, 93 min. Marina Abramovic: The Artist Is Present,* 2010
Top left :Marco Anelli, *Day 68, Portrait 15, 164 min. Marina Abramovic: The Artist Is Present,* 2010
Bottom right: Marco Anelli, *Day 70, Portrait 12, 28 min. Marina Abramovic: The Artist Is Presenent*
2010
Bottom left: Marco Anelli, *Day 68, Marina Abramovic, 420 min. Marina Abramovic: The Artist Is Present*
2010

167. I did not see the performance, nor have I been able to experience Abramovic's work live elsewhere, so when I write about it here, I write about my encounter with the representation of the work rather than the work itself.

What do these images signify? Is Marina Abramovic a strong emotional sender, thus able to infect the spectators with her sadness? Are the audience members who started to cry during the meetings more effective at picking up emotional messages from Abramovic? Beginning to cry when her eyes well up with tears? Empathizing with the artist's suffering, sitting still for eight hours, without breaks? I am conflicted. When looking through Marco Agnelli's documentation images on Flickr, I soon start to recognize some of the crying faces, sometimes because they are famous actors, other times because they keep reappearing, crying every time even though one can read that they stayed only a few minutes face to face with the artist. It makes me wonder if all the crying we see is proof of emotional contagion. Or is it simply another performer's performance in front of camera and audience? A chance to act, to be seen, to have one's image distributed in a variety of channels?

It makes me remember a conversation I had with the acclaimed Swedish actress Cecilia Frode. She told me that the key to be able to emotionally affect an audience in the theatre was to go up on stage and "bleed".[168] I tried to ask her what she meant, what she did exactly to make it happen. I tried to figure out if it corresponded to those very brief moments when I, as an audience of film, theatre or dance, feel deeply touched. Bela Tarr's vulnerable old man, for instance. Was it related to *facing* the audience head-on? It's often been in those moments that I have been engaged the most. We discussed back and forth, but no clear conclusion was to be had. But I think of density again. Of charge. I believe Marina Abramovic is able to both *bleed* for her audience, and create density and charge in the meeting (through a form of non-acting which nevertheless appears as acting to me). But for the subjects within her performances it entails leaving their subjectivity to one side. To *submit*. And it is precisely this submission that she demands in her audience that intensifies the performance. In the documentation of the work, on the other hand, a book filled with portraits, I am left empty. Is it to do with camera position vis-à-vis the documentation? Just like with my own experimentation, see below, I am left standing outside of the reverberating loop of eyes interlocking. And I am not drawn in. The face is simply a face. Something takes place between audience member and performer, but I am left outside. Not to ponder a moment of absorption à la Fried/Diderot, nor eyes reacting outwards towards me.

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168. Conversation with Cecilia Frode, Stockholm 14 May 2013; my translation.

This piece also reminds me of my original investigation undertaken as part of this PhD. It started with me filming the face-to-face encounter taking place during a photographic portraiture session with artist Åsa Johanneson and one of her subjects, Anna.[169] I set up two video cameras, one recording the artist, the other the subject, and filmed their entire sitting, lasting about 30 minutes. I was interested in whether it was possible to follow transference taking place between the photographer and the subject, with the help of Ekman and Friesen's Facial Action Coding System. It did not work – the set-up which wouldn't interfere with Johanneson's shot was at the wrong angle for a good video documentation, and I quickly realized I did not possess the necessary skills to make it work. I also wondered how I affected the situation – the subject seemed quite fazed at not only being photographed but also filmed and analysed afterwards. I did not have a sense that intimacy or exchange happened, and Åsa was not happy with the resulting images.

But, as a follow-on from this, I set up something I thought could turn into a possible artwork investigating two people's continuity and communicability with each other. I wanted to set it up in opposition to what Ernst van Alphen proposes in relation to the photographic portrait: "The portrayer proves his/her artistic originality by consolidating the self of the portrayed."[170] I was interested in exploring other ways of expressing intersubjectivity, without this attempt to 'consolidate the self', instead providing that which is normally hidden in the portrait: the face-to-face interaction as a "simultaneous and reciprocal experience of time and space."[171]

I invited people who did not know each other to come into the studio and look at one another for an extended period of time, while I filmed their encounter. The resulting clips were meant to be projected on either side of a corner, so you could see the two individuals facing each other. It was clear that transference of emotion was happening between the two individuals, even though in my experiment the emotions veered towards joy rather than sadness. Perhaps because no one in the exchange was a designated sender, loading the

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169. Åsa Johannesson and Anna, RCA studios 22 October 2008.
170. Van Alphern, 239
171. Ibid.

encounter with emotional weight. None of the participants was consciously trying to elicit a reaction from the other.[172]

The end result felt like a loop too closed. We as audience were not invited in; we viewed the emotional transference taking place between others, but it did not seem to extend out to include us. I decided against making the work into a finished piece, and left the clips to languish unedited on one of my many hard drives. I needed to rethink both how to unpick what happens between photographer – subject – audience, and how to make artworks that explored my theoretical ideas, perhaps best embodied by Levinas's proposition that the human face is "the source from which all meaning appears".[173]

I will continue the investigation into the external manifestations of emotional empathy, and see if I can learn more about what happens in the meeting between photographer and subject, artwork and viewer. Whereas Hatfield, Cacioppo and Rapson are primarily concerned with emotional contagion, social psychologist Ulf Dimberg and his collaborators at the University of Uppsala have conducted a series of experiments that set out to show how emotional empathy is related to individual differences in regards to facial feedback.[174] They have managed to prove that people with high (as compared to low) marks on the questionnaire measure of emotional empathy, QMEE,[175] react both more strongly and more quickly when exposed to another person's emotional display.[176]

Highly empathic people are both better at identifying *and* correctly reading facial expressions.[177] Dimberg proposes that highly empathic people may also be more susceptible to the emotional content of the expressions, which would in turn create a more intense experience of the stimuli. Studies conducted in a lab setting have shown that "people scoring high in emotional empathy react in accordance with the emotional expression of other persons while people low in empathy

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172. Gavin and Susie, RCA studios 14 November 2008.
173. Levinas, 297.
174. Per Andréasson and Ulf Dimberg. "Emotional Empathy and Facial Feedback." *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior* 32, no. 4 (December 2008), 215.
175. There is currently no way to scientifically 'measure' empathy other than through a questionnaire, although it's probable that soon tests will rely on fMRI scans, instead. This is likely to bring in a whole host of ethical considerations.
176. Dimberg, Andréasson and Thunberg,. 26, citing Dimberg (1990), Lundquist and Dimberg (1995) and Sonny-Borgström (2002)
177. Riggio, Tucker and Coffaro (1989) cited by Dimberg, Andréasson and Thunberg, 27.

do not".[178] He continues:

> Emotional empathy is related to the capacity to react with facial reactions to happy and angry facial expressions and this ability is particularly evident for people high in emotional empathy. This superiority in facial reactions to facial stimuli is accompanied by a higher level of empathic accuracy as indicated by higher intensity of emotional ratings of the happy and angry facial expressions.[179]

Therefore, we can deduce that empathy is directly related to how (much) a person mirrors the expressions of the other, and people high in empathy will facially mirror to a larger degree than people with average to low empathy. This seems to be consistent with the neuroscientific findings on children and individuals with mirror-synaesthesia, as both being highly empathic and having overactive mirror neurons. Quite what the relationships between the outer and inner manifestations of mirroring are, however, have not yet been explored.

Another question that has not been answered at this stage is whether the facial expressions of the 'empathic subject' are in fact due to facial mirroring, or due to empathically feeling the sadness or joy of the other. In short, the mimicking might be more down to emotions, independent of a mirroring effect. Perhaps it is a combination of response patterns that are put into play when one is faced with the face of another, both facial mimicking and an embodied, internal reaction, containing more or less emotional contagion depending on the personality of the receiver. With low empathic people we do not know yet which of the two abilities, or both, are diminished. Some research on autistic individuals shows that when faced with an image of a face, they simply look in the wrong place. When made to look at the most expressive areas of the human face, they too were able to correctly identify the emotion expressed.[180]

Again many of the experiments have been conducted on test persons interacting with photographs rather than other people. The researchers have found that images of facial expressions spontaneously seem to mimic distinct facial reactions in the viewer, expressions that perfectly correspond to the emotional expressions of the faces depicted in the test material.[181] This mimicking happens spontaneously and non-consciously, or, as Gallese would call it, in an embodied fashion, without the test person being conscious of the effect. In accordance with Hatfield et al.'s results, emotional contagion was taking place, whereby the observers not only mimicked but also felt

178. Ibid., 29. See also Wisenfeld et al. (1984).
179. Ibid., 30.
180. Vittorio Gallese, *"The Body in Aesthetic Experience: A Neuroscientific Perspective,"* 2012.
181. Andréasson and Dimberg, 215.

the emotions displayed in the photographs.[182] In fact, it was enough for the subjects to imagine a happy, angry or sad situation for them to react with corresponding facial muscles.[183] Hess and Blairy, on the other hand, conducted experiments in which the aim was to see if they would encounter facial mimicry and emotional contagion when using rather weak and perhaps even idiosyncratic dynamic facial expressions of emotions, like those we are likely to encounter in day-to-day life. They also wanted to investigate if mimicry automatically leads to emotional contagion, thus facilitating emotional recognition. They assert that evidence from Dimberg and Lundquist used images from Ekman and Friesman's seminal 1976 book *Pictures of Facial Affect*, a set of highly recognizable, even prototypical, facial expressions. Much more extreme than we are likely to encounter in real life. Hess and Blairy were not able to replicate the results of Dimberg, specifically finding no correlation between mimicry and emotional contagion.[184] Other studies used moving image clips of politicians featured on news programmes and found that the amount of mimicry was modulated by the political standpoint of the observers. If they shared the politics, they mimicked more than if they held opposing beliefs.[185]

But how does the difference between the experimental set-ups cited above, of using still versus moving images as stimuli, affect their outcome? Previous research points to stills engendering more mimicking behaviour. (I have yet to see a meta study looking at this phenomenon in particular, so am simply basing this statement on my own readings of previous research.)

Perhaps facial expressions in images are clearer in their emotional message than the rapidly changing faces encountered in reality or in most moving image clips. Does that mean that the audience of a still portrait as opposed to a moving image portrait mimic more, therefore experiencing more emotional contagion? My own view is that it is a very different thing watching a talking, moving face and watching a quiet face simply *facing* the camera. In the latter case, the face tends not to move so much, and I believe the impact is similar to that of photographs. I am thinking of how director Ingmar Bergman relentlessly focused his camera on his main characters' comparably still faces (particularly in the films *Persona* and *Cries and Whispers*) during

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182. Ulf Dimberg, "Facial Reactions to Facial Expressions." *Psychophysiology* 19, no. 6 (Nov. 1, 1982): 643–47.
183. G. E. Schwartz, P. L. Fair, P. Salt, M. R. Mandel, and G. L. Klerman. "Facial Muscle Patterning to Affective Imagery in Depressed and Nondepressed Subjects." *Science (New York, N.Y.)* 192, no. 4238 (April 30, 1976): 489–91.
184. Ursula Hess, and Sylvie Blairy. "Facial Mimicry and Emotional Contagion to Dynamic Emotional Facial Expressions and Their Influence on Decoding Accuracy." Internationall Journal of Psychophysiology 40 (2001): 129–41.
185. Ibid.

almost unbearably long clips. Gilles Deleuze, writing of Bergman's facial close-ups, claimed that the Swedish director was "enforcing a coalescence of the human face with the void."[186] Making us consider the fundamental emotional isolation of humans. Or, if we describe it in terms of neuroscience or emotional contagion, he created an *embodied* exchange between viewer and actors, making it all the more powerful as superfluous information was stripped away. (The scenery – ordinary facial movements – the actor's body.) Hatfield et al. have identified an interesting incongruity:

> People seem capable of mimicking others' facial, vocal, and postural expressions with stunning rapidity, and, consequently, are able to 'feel themselves into' others' emotional lives to a surprising extent; however, they also seem oblivious to the importance of emotional contagion in social encounters, and unaware of how swiftly and completely they are able to track the expressions of others.[187]

Willingly or unwillingly. What implication does this have for portrait photography? And for Abramovic's *The Artist is Present*? Is it possible that skilful portrait photographers mimic facial expressions and postures of their sitters as a way of eliciting the desired result in the portrait photograph? Or, do they act more like senders, trying to get the sitters to mimic them for desired effect? If actors can emotionally 'bleed' on command as a technique for engendering an empathetic reaction in the audience, why not Marina? Does the fact that it happens in an art gallery rather than on a theatre stage make me want more *authenticity* from the encounter? Would *The Actress is Present* have had the same effect?

Certain movements, like neurolinguistic programming, have tried to exploit the natural tendency for creating social cohesion and ties between people through facial mirroring – but it is unlikely that we are able to learn to mimic the process of emotional contagion consciously, as it happens so rapidly. The boxer Mohammad Ali, trained to be able to respond to the bodily movement of his opponents with incredible swiftness, could only manage at the very fastest a response rate of 190 milliseconds to spot a light and an added 40 milliseconds to initiate a response to it, when ordinary college students were found to be able to synchronize their movements within 21 milliseconds – completely unconsciously.[188]

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186. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. 1 edition. (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 1986), 105.
187. Hatfield, and Cacioppo and Rapson, 183.
188. M.R Davis, "Perceptual and Affective Reverberation Components." In A.B Goldstein & G.Y. Michaels (Eds) Empathy: Development, Training, and Consequences, 87. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1985.

So what are the implications for my own practice? I keep revolving around the portrait and the desire to create an embodied connection between artwork and viewer. In the next part, I will describe three practice projects that all explicitly demand an empathic engagement from the audience. The first, *Breathing Instrument,* invokes a sense of human vulnerability through affecting the audience's own breathing patterns, inspired by my own struggles with asthma. For the second project, I decided to abolish the camera entirely, instead inviting the audience to meet the subjects directly through a performance piece. Finally, the last work, *Merciful, Wonderful* is an attempt at liberating Greece's national icon from its prison, inside a recently erected church and hidden away under a deep layer of jewellery and gold.

3.7 Practice IV, *Breathing Instrument*

HDV loop, 2 minutes, wall-mounted 19" vertical LED screen in eyeheight, headphones

The moving image loop *Breathing Instrument* focuses on a tuba player from the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. The musician sits in a darkened space with his tuba on his lap, but, rather than play on his instrument, he laboriously breathes through it, drawing air in and out with great effort. The work alludes to the mysteries of surface and depth, exteriority and interiority.

The image and sound of this classical instrument are subverted, as if it is a kind of externalized bodily organ, revealing the primordial that is always present but often forgotten. When listening, one automatically attempts to sync one's own breathing with the in- and out-breaths on the soundtrack, amplified by the tuba and drawn with great effort. One feels out of breath, as if about to faint, yet at the same time connected to the meditative, trancelike mood of the depicted man.

The work is installed on a wall-hung vertical LCD screen, with adjoining headphones for the sound. The use of headphones rather than speakers was meant to intermingle the audience's internal sounds with the musician's breath. The work has been shown both with a large LCD screen and a smaller screen, measuring 19 inches in height. When originally concieved I wanted the tuba player to be as near to life-sized as possible, as I was under the impression that this

would incerase the sense of bodily mirroring and discomfort in the audience. After the first exhibition, however, I realised that it did not need to be large to have effect - in fact, a smaller screen mounted at eye-height made the viewer move forwards, increasing the intimacy of the experience.

With this work, I experimened with how to create or enhance an embodied connection to the artwork. Syncing breathing rhythms is something we do without reflecting on it when close to another person, but in this work the element of discomfort is there to make us conscious of it happening. It directly relates to my readings around mirror neurons - but rather than focussing on that elusive link between the interior lives of audience and artworks, I focussed on the body, the physical link, as a means of loading the work with psychological content. I also wanted to play with the idea of externalizing our insides, what we can see and cannot see. Is it possible to prolong the moment of embodied connection through using a static moving image clip rather than a still photograph? Do the use of moving rather than still images bring the work nearer to the unmediated meeting? In the next project I decided to remove the lens in order to further explore the embodied interaction between audience and artwork.

3.8 Practice V, Det Ordnar Sig Nog

Performance, duration 30 minutes occuring every 30 minutes over 2 days.[189]

"Det ordnar sig nog" is a phrase from the 1970s Swedish play *Hemmet* (*The Home*), by Kent Andersson. I appropriated a moment of heightened connection between a theatre audience and an actor and re-contextualized it within the exhibition space. The performers are drawn from the amateur Blackebergs Senior Acting Club,[190] and I asked them to improvise on the two phrases, which relate to fears of old age, illness and death. I was interested in exploring what would happen if I removed the lens, and let the audience experience the action, or moment, live. As opposed to experiencing a whole play, I wanted to remove the narrative and in this way isolate a moment in time, much in the same way as the camera does. Would it still be possible to retain the tension in the experience? Would the performers manage to affect the audience?

During the performance of this piece, the door of the performance space was closed, and a sign on the door informed the audience the times that they were able to open it, and that they were welcome to enter or exit at any time. They were neither asked to interact with the performers, nor told to refrain from doing so. When opening the door, five elderly people could be seen in a white room, with white semi-transluscent curtains, sitting down or walking around while repeating the phrases *"Det ordnar sig nog" (It will be OK, hopefully)* and *"Det går inte" (It doesn't work).* The performers were told to use the entire floor space - to sit down on any of the 5 chairs in the room if they needed a rest - and interact with the audience if the occasion arose.

The audience walked into the room, and experienced the shifting mood of the performers, whether they understood Swedish or not. The performers, not being professional actors but an ordinary group of ordinary people wearing ordinary clothes, acting out feelings we are not used to seeing expressed (particularly not in Sweden), loaded the empathic meeting between audience and performers. Perhaps the element of surprise when walking into the space and seeing the group of elderly people dressed in beige helped charge the situation - as if they had walked into

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189. Funded by and performed at IASPIS, Stockholm, October 2009.
190. A suburb of Stockholm, Sweden.

an entirely different reality.

This performance came about at a particularly difficult moment in my personal life, and I was interested in making the conflicting voices in my head manifest. I had remained professional and committed during the length of the residency,[191] hiding my troubles from those surrounding me. But hearing the conflicting feelings I had secretly struggled with echo around the walls of the Swedish Arts Council made me feel surprisingly exhilarated. And did it work, this attempt at removing the lens? Did an embodied meeting take place? It makes me think back to what Gallese termed "liberated embodied simulation"[192] whereby we are able to leave our defensive mechanisms behind when viewing artworks. I don't think anyone in the audience felt they were able to do that when entering the performance space. Rather than the densification occuring between artwork and viewer, a sense of immediacy took its place.

Two video cameras mounted on the walls recorded the duration of the performance, one on either side of the space, as I wanted the audience to also be part of the documentation. Here, on the other hand, I was disappointed. Much had been lost in the translation between direct encounter and represented encounter. The work existed only in the moment of the performance. Once it was confined to the screen, it did not manage to hold my attention or create an embodied connection with me. But then I had a conversation with someone who had not been there for the performance, instead only seeing the documentation, a simultaneous split screen shot from two different angles. For him the work was still there; still loaded. Empathy and engagement felt. So maybe in this instance it was my own *memory* of the experience that made me unable to assess the documentation for what it was. The same can happen with photographs – but it's not often so for me. I usually know quite well what I will have caught on film and seldom get surprised or disappointed. That does not mean I am always happy with what I do – simply that I tend to know if I managed to 'get it' or not.

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191.   1st April until 30th September 2009, At IASPIS, the Swedish Arts Council's residency programme in Stockholm, Sweden

192   See page 76 of this thesis, and Gallese 2012

3.9 Practice VI, Merciful, Wonderful (in collaboration with Loukia Alavanou)[193]

Single screen HD projection, 5,20 minutes

In the 1820s, during the Greek revolution, Mary repeatedly appeared to a nun residing on the Greek island of Tinos, asking for her lost portrait, allegedly painted by the apostle Luke, to be unearthed. The Maria Icon of Tinos was subsequently found in a field, and has since been receiving large numbers of pilgrims. The enduring fascination of the Icon is centred on its unavailability – soon after its discovery it was completely covered by a dense layer of offerings: gold, jewellery and precious stones. This covering up with jewellery can be seen as creating a sort of extra surface in front of the image, a skin which is never removed.

Despite being completely hidden, the Icon is said to have a miraculous influence on thousands of lives. Even today, valuable objects and so-called tamas (silver offerings depicting body parts or objects representing the wishes of the pilgrims) are deposited beside the Icon, in exchange for the promise of a wish fulfilled.

Concealed behind precious gems, the Icon is marked with an absence that becomes the presentation of an unpresentable thing. Is part of the Icon's seductive qualities the fact that this gap creates confusion, turning the Icon into a spectral object, like a ghost? We attempt to articulate this void by making a metaphor between the skin of the Icon and the skin of cinema, exploring what lies beyond the surface through the cut within editing. We treat the cut both as a potential entry point to the void; and as an opportunity to fill it. A technique of intercutting different filmic sources through montage in a way that can be likened to collage becomes a way of tearing apart the skin of the image/Icon, creating the "rend" that Georges Didi-Huberman speaks of, where possible alternative meanings can emerge.[194]

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193. The work happened in response to a commission from the Swedish Institute in Athens, curated by Antonios Bogdakis. I invited Loukia Alavanou, a Greek artist working primarily in animation, and a native of Tinos, to collaborate with me. For the purpose of this PhD, a rough mapping out of the division of labour: I did most of the camera and text work, and Alavanou the soundtrack. However, there were overlaps and cross-fertilizations taking place throughout the process. The editing was done in close collaboration.

194. We draw a parallel with what is happening in the wider Greek society today; the fragile surface of civilization has started rupturing, and previously hidden forces such as the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party emerge.

We move between close haptic[195] 'insider' images that push us out of cinema's illusionary depth and invite our eyes to linger on the surface of the image, dissolving the boundaries between the beholder and the thing beheld, and objective views where the beholder is conceived of as discrete, as having solid borders. If objective images pull us into idealized space, haptic images help us feel the connectivity between ourselves, the image and its material support, and the world to which the image connects us.

The soundtrack runs parallel to the images, and consists of sounds created in the studio. In this way, the soundtrack enables a narrative surge as we move from one genre to another. This use of sound is also a way of 'making strange', removing our filmed footage from the realm of the real and making other experiences possible. The sound enables a displacement, a shift from reality to fantasy. The video is divided into three distinct and clearly separated parts.[196] It starts with text appearing, typed sentences with scribbles around them. The sentences are taken from accounts from the Nun Pelagia, and from Swedish feminist Fredrika Bremer who visited Tinos soon after the discovery of the Icon.

The pencil scribbles change how we perceive the text. Rather than proclaiming to the viewer, they invite the viewer in, to take the place of the narrator, to feel the movement of the hand against the paper, to experience the materiality of the surface. Eraser marks and words being crossed out indicate a hesitation within the narration. It is not closed off and presented to the viewer as absolute. After the last sentence, where we can vaguely make out the sentence "she loves us" obliterated with frenetic pencil marks, the sound of a heartbeat appears as a tama of a hand, suspended from the church ceiling, slowly revolves. Short clips from the interior of the church, the covered Icon with believers praying, start appearing. These images, visually familiar to most Greeks as they are televised each year, are removed from the familiar through the exaggerated

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195. For an description of haptic imagery, see Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory And Multisensory Media*. 1 edition. (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2002)

196. As Loukia is based in Athens, and I in Stockholm, we had 2 weeks together to work on the film edit, separated by several months, and perhaps this is why the transitions between the sections seem somewhat brusque and unresolved. Another reason could be the failure of managing to merge our distinct art practices and find a common, unified language. As it is now, instead my slow, measured and empathic pace is combined with the more aggressive cutting techniques and sound design of Loukia in the middle section creating a rather jarring overall impression.

soundtrack, where priests are given the sound of wind-up toys, and a clip of the dispensing of bread is reversed, the pieces being instead taken from the penitents.[197]

Spending time in the church around the annual pilgrimage while Greece was plunged in a deep economic crisis was an upsetting experience. Watching the mostly poor and mostly female believers approach the church on their hands and knees with the hope of curing their ill relatives, and seeing how hard-earned cash kept being deposited in one of the many money collection points throughout the church, jarred with tales of monks being flown to the US to be cured when they became ill; meeting the mother of a young child, scarred from his many cancer tumours, as she crawled towards the church, while I knew that my collaborator's uncle, a monk, had been flown to the US at the expense of the church when he contracted cancer, left me with a bad taste in my mouth.

Our mocking of the priests was a way to release that feeling. It was a way of reclaiming power, particularly feminine power. The relationship between the monks and priests and the female believer was defined by power on behalf of the clergymen and by passivity and submissiveness from the female believers. Just as I, in my work, want my subjects to be the ones defining the encounter with me and my camera, so I wanted the pilgrims to regain power from the church and its rigid patriarchal structures.

The camera returns to the bejewelled box containing the Icon, travelling up and down in a close-up, as if searching. But suddenly the door of the box is slammed shut, and the clip jump-cuts to an aquarium being broken by a sledgehammer, appropriated from *The Seventh Continent* by Michel Haneke.[198] Clips of surfaces being broken and torn follow. Here, Didi-Huberman's rend/the broken aquarium is followed by an entry into a dream-space, a space where other interpretations can emerge. The screen goes black for a moment, then is filled by a close-up of

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197. I write this in the days after the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris, thinking back to the opening of the show featuring this work in Athens, when we (and the institution) were worried about Golden Dawn hearing about our project and deciding to target it. Only weeks before, a theatre play had been attacked. I feel fortunate to be able to critize and even mock religious ceremonies and practices that I find disturbing and negative.

198. Haneke, Michael. *Seventh Continent*. Kino Video, 2006.

face. On the soundtrack, priests can be heard chanting, interspersed with gunfire sounding in time with the blinking eyes of the face.

With this face we tried to create a transcendent moment, where Mary, if you like, has been liberated from her cover once more, and is allowed to flow out and interact with us. The face keeps looking at the camera, unflinchingly meeting our gaze, reaching out towards us in its humanity. We feel the empathy the man has for us, and we for him, as we reach out towards each other in the meeting. The face-to-face interaction resolves the tension in the earlier sections, and points towards a position of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Whose is this face, you may want to ask, what is the story? For us it was of no importance.
I filmed him very early in the morning, as he had just woken up in the courtyard of the church, where many of the pilgrims slept. We could not talk; we did not have a shared language. The only thing we had was our bodies: gestures and faces communicating with each other. I filmed him for some minutes, then our meeting was over. Six months later I received an email from someone who had seen the exhibition in Athens. Its subject heading was "A friend of yours" and it contained a mobile phone snap of the man, whom she had encountered on the streets of Athens. It turned out the man had been a seaman but now worked as a cleaner in a brothel. A man whom most of the Greek audience who saw the piece interpreted as a woman. Mary incarnate.

Finally, in this work many ideas of how we interact with images were tried out. Shots of tearing, smashing, scraping were all included with the intent of evoking a bodily resonance in the spectator, and the marks of the scribbling pencil across and around the printed text in the first sections connect the audience to the marks on the screen in an embodied relation. But in the end, what really worked amidst this cacaphony of clips and sounds and text was the face of the other, the old man facing the camera in stillness. So I return to the portrait, to the other looking back at me. To hear what he says to me. I don't know him, I can't know what he is thinking. He is other. The only thing I can do is look.

I searched for her
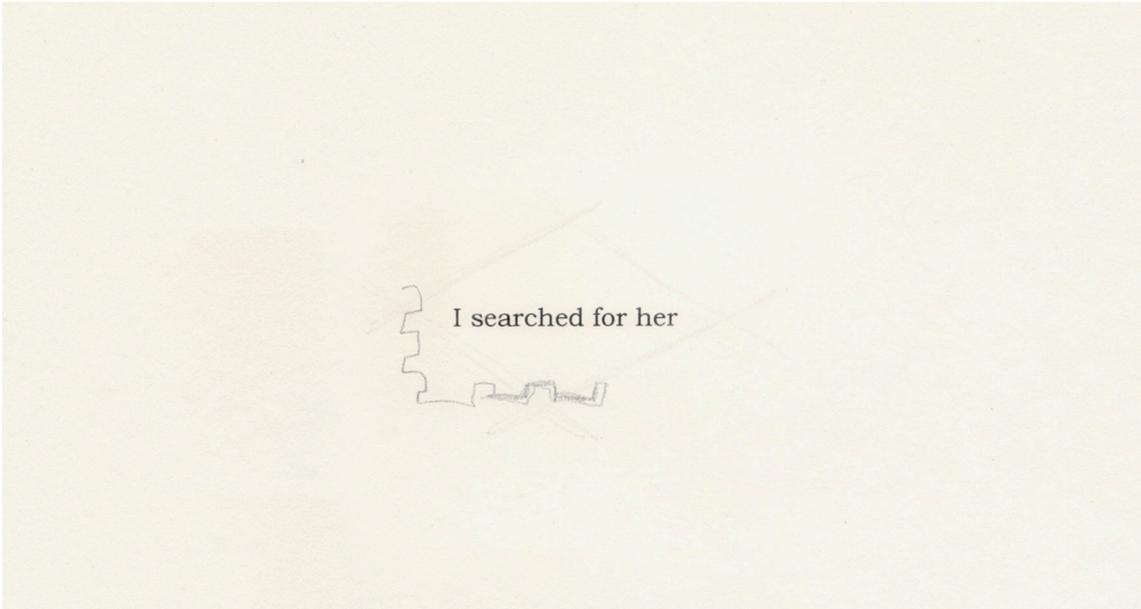
Conclusion

Every picture is an increase of being.[199]

Hans-Georg Gadamer

We continually project the body into the world in order that its image might return to us: onto the other the mirror, the animal, and the machine, and onto the artistic image.[200]

Susan Stewart

I think of photography, and I think of empathy. Photography is a technique that has since its invention been used as a tool to capture the contained – gain access to the interior lives of others, and in the process perhaps find out more about ourselves. Photographic portraits have been scrutinized, and certain master photographers have claimed to be able to represent the other with 'unconditional veracity'. Although these ideas have been thoroughly discredited by postmodernism and artists like Thomas Ruff, we are still fascinated by photographic portraiture, and photographically reproduced faces are ever-present in popular culture and on film. What precisely is it that so holds us/draws us in with photographed faces? A recent debate in *The Guardian* comes to mind, where, as a result of art critic Jonathan Jones polemically denouncing photography's status as art, another of the paper's art writers, Sean O'Hagan, came to its rescue. Underneath a headline proclaiming "Photography is Art and Always Will Be" – a striking close-up portrait of Samuel Beckett shot by Jane Bown.[201] Why would O'Hagan choose a portrait photograph, taken as part of a newspaper assignment, to be the first example, rather than a work from the 'high cannon' of contemporary art using photography?

Let's look more closely at the image in question. Jane Bown has said that her meeting with Beckett was very brief, and indeed she preferred short encounters with her subjects. When describing her feelings relating to these meetings, she talked about how she would, during the short duration

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199. Hans-Georg Gadamer quoted in Joanna Woodall, *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* (Manchester University Press, 1997), 240.
200. Stewart p. 125
201. "Sean O'Hagan on Photography | Art and Design." *The Guardian*, December 13, 2014. http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/series/sean-o-hagan-on-photography.

of her looking at someone through the lens of her camera, "feel an intense love for them."[202] As I write this, Samuel Beckett's eyes stare out at me from my computer screen, and it is as if I, for a second, get a chance to meet him, too. Something happens in me. I am not unmoved. Perhaps the question has been asked wrongly. Perhaps rather than asking ourselves, What can I know of the other by observing his portrait?, we should ask ourselves simply – how does seeing this face make me feel? (I was interested to read, in one of the many articles appearing about Jane Bown when she passed away recently, that according to a colleague she claimed to be able to read people's character in their faces. The same colleague said that, although he argued with her about this, he had to concede that she was often right.[203] Why do I find this compelling and not simply an archaic throwback to discredited physiognomic ideas? Because she might have read the character less by looking at, and judging, the features of the person's face, and more by being in tune with her own *embodied* reaction to her meeting others. How they made her *feel*.
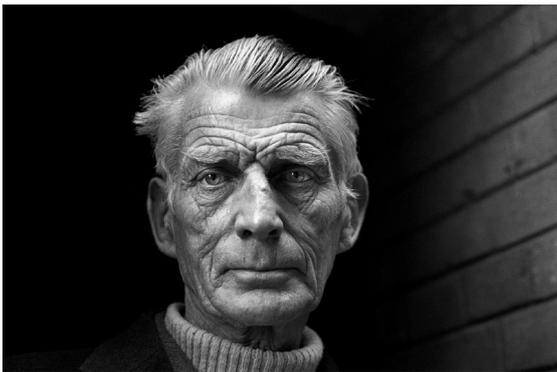

Fig IX

Over the past few decades a common trope among photographers focusing on depicting faces has been to use strategies to disable the subjects' self-presentation. In Bettina Zwehl's *Alina*, the subjects are surprised by the flash of the camera whilst sitting in a dark room listening to Arvo Pärt's music. Here, no interaction with camera or photographer is possible. But what do those images evoke in us? What is recorded is the non-meeting, but as a result it is difficult for me, as audience, to encounter the subject. The images become artefacts similar to a scientific collection, but they do not subvert the rules, reach out and touch me.

Fig IX   Jane Bown, Samuel Beckett 1976

202. Luke Dodd, "Jane Bown: Turning the Lens on Britain's Shyest Photographer." *The Guardian*, December 14, 2014. http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/apr/24/jane-bown-observer-photographer-luke-dodd.
203. "Jane Bown Remembered: 'We Had Fun, Didn't We?'." *The Guardian*, January 9, 2015. http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/dec/28/jane-bown-remembered-obit.

Their scope is limited, and they do not hold sway over me. I may get a voyeuristic pleasure from seeing a 'hidden' moment, but I do not engage intersubjectively with the subjects.

Fig X

Another common strategy employed by portrait photographers centres around the eternal photographic desire to catch "the gap between intention and effect"[204], as Diane Arbus famously defined her working method. A goal one encounters again and again in articles and books about photographers mining their fellow humans' countenances for their work. German artist Albert Tubke, for instance, has declared that his interest lies in "the big gap between what my subjects think they are and what is finally visible".[205] Rineke Djikstra, probably the most famous portrait photographer working today, also picked up on the idea, saying that her work aimed to "strike the balance between what people want to show, and what they show in spite of themselves."[206] The photographer as a manipulator, then, calling forth that which we wish to keep hiding. This implies an unspoken but unequal power relation between subject and photographer, where the latter operates in collusion with the audience.[207]

Fig X   Bettina von Zwehl, *Alina,* 2004

204. Diane Arbus and Doon Arbus. *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*. Special edition edition. (New York: London: Aperture, 2012), 2.
205. Benedict Burbridge, "Exacting Photography: Self-Imaging and Its Frustration in Contemporary Art Photography." *Re.bus*, no. 5 (summer 2010). http://www.essex.ac.uk/arthistory/research/pdfs/rebus_issue_5/Burbridge.pdf.
206. Sara Douglas, "The Gap between Intention and Effect." Flash Art 36, no. 232 (October 2003): 79.

207. In contrast to how Ariella Azoulay describes the encounter between photographer and photographed as a site of encounter leaving traces of both parties in the resulting photograph, traces neither party can control. Azoulay, Ariella. The Civil Contract of Photography. New York : Cambridge, Mass: Zone Books, 2012.

Art historian Michael Fried, in his recent book on *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, posits that "the portrait calls for exhibiting a subject, the sitter, to the public gaze; put another way, the basic action depicted in a portrait is the sitter's presentation of himself or herself to be beheld."[208] He seems to be of the view that a portrait, to be interesting, should be able to show us some truth about the sitters, and that, for instance, Thomas Struth's long-lasting relationships with the families he photographed as part of his *Family Portrait* series make the work more successful, and granted it emotional access to the sitters. I would argue that neither the gap between intention and effect nor a long relationship between subject and photographer has anything to do with loading the images with emotional content. Let's return to August Sander. When looking at the multitude of subjects in front of his camera, found in a variety of situations and settings, inside and outside, we are not prompted to draw easy conclusions about them. Rather, as Goldman writes, "the subjects are left in control of their faces; history may interfere, but Sander does not".[209] Where in Diane Arbus's (and many others') portraiture work the same emotional tone pervades the entire oeuvre, in August Sander's each subject is invited to hold his own humanity; to reach out towards us and meet us with his subjectivity.

We reveal ourselves when facing others, in the *meeting* with others. When we set up a series of conditions with the goal of removing the subject's conscious control, like the aforementioned project, I would argue that we do not understand what a photographic portrait can *do,* and how it does it. So, if my goal has been to free photographic portraiture from its history and its traditions, in a sense, I believe it has the potential to become a place where new significations can take place, where we can encounter ourselves through our interaction with the other.

And how can this happen? The evidence on emotional contagion and facial feedback is contradictory. And so is bringing psychoanalytic theories into dialogue with neuroscience as a way of offering new perspectives on the meeting between photographer and subject. What we know of the mind-brain-body is nowhere near being resolved, and neuroscience is commonly accused of being naive and simplistic by psycoanalysts. Darian Leader goes as far as disclaiming

208. Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*. 1 edition, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 192.
209. Judith Goldman, "Diane Arbus: The Gap between Intention and Effect." *Art Journal* 34, no. 1 (October 1, 1974), 33.

the importance of mirror neurons "if such a thing exists."[210] But it does seem that people more prone to emotional contagion mirror others' facial reactions more, are more emotionally affected by others' emotional states, and are less prone to flood a meeting with another with their own emotions. Perhaps it could be that portrait photographers who are consistently able to generate work that touches us are more likely to be emotional receivers who will strongly mirror their subjects. I speculate that people who have strong situated reactions to photographic portraiture also have a higher susceptibility to emotional contagion. According to Gallese and Freedman, "the artwork becomes the mediator of the motor and emotional resonance arising between the artist and observer."[211] It makes the beholder *feel* that which is beheld in an embodied, non-verbal and non-conscious manner. In this way, embodied simulation plays a vital role in our interest and appreciation of art and portraiture.

My own practice has been driven by a movement around the photographic portrait. I have taken a cue from Baudelaire, and used my own body and emotions as a sounding board, helping me define how and where moments of enhanced connection with others and with the world appear. Text, and the process of writing, emerged as a complementary tool in describing my interconnectedness with my surroundings. A series of experiments have been brought together, containing both successes and failures, reflecting on the most important working method, an open-endedness in terms of formal considerations. For me, it is counter-intuitive to hold the practice down in rigidly set rules, and I have thus welcomed moments of rebellion and digression.

The works are presented as a series of distinct text and image works, using both still and moving images, and together they propose to bridge, or mediate, the distance between ourselves and others. To articulate our encounter – and our separateness.

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210. Panel Discussion, *The Brain and the Mind - Discussion 3 of 6 , The Workings of Empathy,* Tuesday 4th December 2012, Edmond J. Safra Lecture Theatre, Strand Campus, King's College London, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VF7hG0S1dAw
211. Gallese Vittorio*: "From Mirror Neurons to Embodied Simulation" Part 1*, 2012. Lecture at the Arnold Pfeffer Centre for Neuropsychoanalysis at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute

What do I define as a suitable ambition for the portrait, then – my own and those of others? It is to create the kind of work where the power relationship fades into the background, and empathy, intersubjectivity, is allowed to take the front seat. Where the photographer renounces his or her upper hand (in having the control over when to release the camera shutter)[212] and opens him or herself up to the non-verbal intersubjective meeting, and lets us, the viewer, *feel* the embodied connection with the other. And whilst I do not believe it is possible to completely avoid any kind of power relations affecting the meeting between photographer and subject, I do believe that it is possible to be still and listen to those that are quiet - and try not to dominate the encounter.

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212. I am thinking of Richard Avdeon describing his encounters with his subjects , see page 82 of this thesis and Bolton p 267.

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Additional Materials

DVD containing moving image projects:

51. *A Place to Call Home,* miniDV film, 11 min, 2007

60. *Down,* HVD loop, 8 min, 2008

95. *Breathing Instrument,* HDV loop, 2 min, 2008

98. *Det ordnar sig nog, Efter Kent Andersson,* Performance documentation, 2009

103. *Merciful, Wonderful,* Single screen HD installation, 5.20 min, 2013
in collaboration with Loukia Alavanou

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During the period of registered study in which this
thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for
any other academic award or qualification.
The material included in this thesis has not been submitted
wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification

Cecilia Järdemar, February 2015

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