STRANGE PHANTOMS AND FICTITIOUS DREAMLANDS:

ART, LIFE AND ME

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Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D)

Abstract

I have always felt that you should never make a decision following a lunchtime nap. There is something about this space and time, a kind of momentary discordance with the world, that seems particular to this break in the day. It is difficult to define, yet quite distinct to the moment of waking up in the morning. The lunchtime nap is a kind of disruption to consciousness, to daily life, and in its wake the world can appear quite strange: dreamlife and real life becoming confusingly intertwined in the imagination. A fictitious dreamland that infects the remainder of the day.

Within my research, photography often becomes a starting point for triggered imagination. While the purpose of this project is not to define the imagination, a key concern of my PhD is focused on exploring and investigating whether an imaginary action could be identified as a Happening, and through doing so, to reimagine the space of the Happening through the lens of photography. Like the moment of photography, a Happening can never be repeated. *Strange Phantoms and Fictitious Dreamlands* offers a consideration of the conjunction between photography and Happenings as a means to explore the intersections between art, life, and identity. An understanding of performativity infuses this practice-led research. What does it mean to perform the identity of an artist? What does it mean to perform the identity of oneself? This study is also about gaps, and about things which happen in between things. These gaps occur between history and representation, between images and interpretation, between the artist and the viewer.

My photographic and installation based practice has driven this study, drawing on everyday moments and continuously questioning the relationship between art and life, often using absurdist means. Artworks and

exhibitions made during the course of this research project become the foundations for the chapters in the thesis. Chapter One begins with a focus on the relationship between photography, crime scenes and the unrepeatable moment, offering a reimagining of the Happening within a contemporary context and considering works by Weegee and Mac Adams. The second chapter of the thesis continues the study of the intersections between art and life, extending this to a focus on how art can influence the world and others, in unexpected ways. This writing tells the story of a journey that began as a personal expedition, one which resulted in a discovery that was reported in news publications in both China and the UK. This leads into the third and final chapter of the thesis, which continues my investigation into ideas of the Happening, with a focus on news publications and how these reflect and potentially distort events from everyday life. The writing of the thesis forms a key part of my practice. A storytelling narrative voice is employed throughout the chapters, in order to perform – through the action of writing – the event of the Happening, and the subjective experience that occurs through a process of reflection.

Strange Phantoms and Fictitious Dreamlands brings together a study of Happenings, photography, narrative and everyday life, in order to offer a new contribution to practice-led research into subjectivity, and artworks which interrogate the borders between art and life.

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This thesis represents partial submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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 other than that for which it is now submitted.

Ruidi Mu, March 2019

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My mother and father, you are the wind beneath my wings.
And **myself**.

INTRODUCTION

That face he had seen was to be the only peacetime image to survive the war. Had he really seen it? Or had he invented that tender moment to prop up the madness to come?

- Chris Marker, *La Jetée*, 1962

Confession

I am at an awkward age – neither young nor old. And for quite some time, I was naive and rash. There seems to be a fire that never goes out, burning in my chest. Nevertheless, at the beginning of this research I was looking for a breakthrough, a reason or an outlet, helplessly and restlessly. My subjective feelings have always controlled my life. I own these emotions, but I cannot always manage them. These feelings are associated with some things or some bodies that can feel as though they have nothing to do with me. Unexpected mood swings and an unstable mental state lasted for almost two years.

This state of mild concussion lasted until the middle of my PhD studies. I then started to try to recall, tidy up and piece together my life over the last two years, using little things such as old photographs and roughly written notes to trigger my thoughts. It seems as though that time was stolen. I experienced what had happened, but I cannot confirm whether it was true or not. However, what I am recalling is perhaps another imaginary experience, akin to the hallucinatory memories of the protagonist in Chris Marker's *La Jetée*.[1]

My research revolves around a number of questions which focus on the border between art and life in the exploration of whether an imaginary action could be identified as a Happening, and, through doing so, whether the space of the Happening could be reimagined through the lens of photography. The motivation for this research was ignited during my MA studies, during which I experimented with a series of live performances, with a particular interest in a reconsideration of Allan Kaprow's idea of Happenings and art-as-life. At the time, this focus on the concept of Happenings led me to become troubled by the act of documentation, and in particular the act of recording performances using photography and video.[2] My performance practice had always involved objects, and I moved towards retaining these objects as physical evidence of the performance, instead of maintaining an image archive of the events. Later, in the studio, I would photograph these objects, and subsequently came to the conclu-

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[1] *La Jetée*, dir: Chris Marker, Argos Films, (1962) [release date: 1966]

[2] Amelia Jones discusses the problematic relationship between photography and performance in her essay, '"Presence" in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation'. Amelia Jones, '"Presence" in Absentia', *Art Journal*, 56:4 (1997), pp.11-18. [accessed 16 March, 2018]. See also: Alice Maude-Roxby, *Live Art on Camera: Performance and Photography* (Southampton: John Hansard Gallery, 2007).

sion that the images were more potent than both the initial performances and their residual objects.

At the beginning of this PhD research, my attention was primarily focused on an exploration of photography-as-environment and performance-as-imagination. During the initial stages of this project, I began with a study of the imagination – which soon proved to be endless, far-fetched and impossible to assess. Yet it was this early period of thinking that led me to find the questions at the heart of this research, that explores relationships between photography, everyday life, Happenings, and the imagination of the audience.

In the handwritten note that accompanies his Happening *Watching* (1967), Allan Kaprow proposed that a Happening is a kind of game.[3] In order for a game to exist, it requires an indispensable point: it has to include some kind of rule. An example of this can be found in the simple hand game Rock-Paper-Scissors. We all know that the rock could smash the scissors, the scissors could cut the paper, and paper could wrap around the rock. It is the manner in which the three elements interact that makes the game function. During the first years of this research, and perhaps due to the elusive nature of the focus of my study, it often felt as though I was explaining only partial and distinctive elements of the rules of the game, as if demonstrating how to use a rock to smash scissors, how to cut paper with a pair of scissors, and how to wrap a rock with paper, without mentioning that in order for the game to work it required an understanding of the intersections between all of these elements and actions.

This research project is primarily about gaps, about things which happen in between things. These gaps occur between history and representation, between images and interpretation, between the artist and the viewer. It is also about the act of photography and the actions involved in looking at images, which recall the words of Jean-Paul Sartre in *The Imagination*: 'the image is an act, not a thing'.[4] Photography can be said to transcend time in some way: it exists in one time – the history of the image – and yet exists in another, the time of the viewing present. The histories contained within may be documentary, and they may be fiction. My own images represent a certain history, one which includes my own identity as an artist, and throughout this research project I explore the connections between

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[3] Allan Kaprow, handwritten note for Watching, 1967, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 12, folder 8), cited in Allan Kaprow, *Art as Life* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008),p.71.

[4] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imagination*, trans. Kenneth Williford and David Rudrauf, (London: Routledge, 2012), p.144.

life, art and me. It is the point where these three entities meet that is most important for this study. Drawing on research into the Happenings of the 1960s and photographic theory, and through the implementation of a narrative approach to writing, this study aims to demonstrate an approach to thinking about the intersections between the everyday, the work of art and ourselves.

My artworks oscillate between the ephemeral boundary that can be said to exist between art and life, combining photography and installation in order to understand and develop a relationship between the image and with self-mirroring in a text; findings from everyday sources such as mainstream newspapers published in the UK and China; and a selection of works by photographic artists detailed below. All of these examples will be explored in this thesis. In order to offer an understanding of the trajectory of this research, the following section provides a contextual review of the sources and ideas which led me towards my key references, outlined above.

Contextual Review

One of the earliest seeds of this research was sown in the summer of 2015, when I visited the Jeu de Paume museum in Paris, France. At this point, my PhD proposal had been accepted at the Royal College of Art and I was due to commence my studies in the autumn. My research questions addressed the conjunctions of photography-as-environment and performance-as-imagination, stemming from my previous work focusing on live performance and its relationship to the document, as described above. Sometimes you can discover what you like from understanding more about what you don't like – or, in other words, the development of my research questions came from a process of whittling away those questions that felt less relevant, less urgent, for my study.

Valérie Jouve's exhibition 'Bodies, Resisting' (Jeu de Paume, 2015) brought together a collection of the French artist's photographic and video works[5] (see Figure 1). It was the first time that I had come across the artist's work, and I was struck by this accumulation of various portraits of figures – some presented at human scale, others quite small and intimate – and how these were juxtaposed with images of barren urban scenes and landscapes. In particular, it was the work *Les sorties de bureau* (1998-2002) that caught my eye. A series of approximately thirty portraits were presented, running into and around a corner of the gallery. Hung at an unusually low height, each portrait was printed at a fairly small scale (a little larger than A4), so it felt as though you were peering down into the tiny lives of the figures contained within the images. These full-body portraits presented a series of office workers, mainly businessmen, and, as the title alludes to, each were caught in an action that might belong to someone leaving the office after a day of work. The images were in fact taken on the streets of Paris and New York, with the photographer setting up her camera outside office buildings in order to capture her subjects as they left their various jobs and businesses. And yet, looking at these works, no evidence of the environment is visible – and it was this element that was particularly striking to me. Using computer graphics editing software, the artist had digitally cut out each figure from their scene and placed them against a backdrop of neutral grey so that all the viewer was left with was these uncanny business people in mid-action, floating in a nondescript void.

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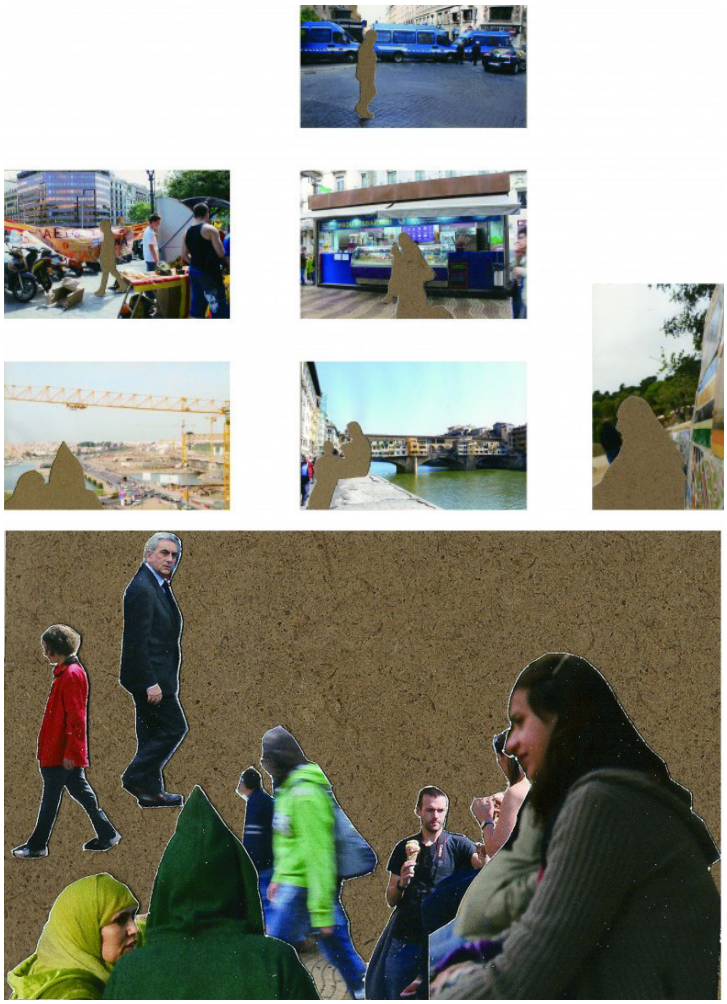
[5] Valérie Jouve, 'Bodies, Resisting', Jeu de Paume, Paris, 2 June 2015 – 27 September 2015. See also: *Valérie Jouve, Corps en résistance* (Bégard: Filigranes Editions, 2015). [accessed 16 March, 2018]. See also: Alice Maude-Roxby, *Live Art on Camera: Performance and Photography* (Southampton: John Hansard Gallery, 2007).

1. Valérie Jouve, *Les sorties de bureau*, 1998-2002

When I encountered these works in the Paris gallery, the series brought to mind an earlier work of my own – a series of accidental portraits made in 2011 (see Figure 2). I had collected a number of images of figures captured in mid-action as they walked in front of a scene I had been attempting to photograph. While initially considered as photographic failures, these figures became more interesting to me than the cityscapes I had set out to photograph. I cut out the figures, scanned them and presented them floating in cheap frames. Isolating them from their original context, as with Jouve's subjects, the viewer is left to imagine their own backdrops. It was this activation in the mind of the percipient that fed my early thinking about the relationship between imagination and performance. It also helped me to clarify that while this was not the particular direction in which I hoped to push my practice, there was something about evidence as opposed to narrative that would be important for the development of my future research.

The notion of the photograph as evidence and as a form of forensics, and how this might relate to crime scenes, was the subject of two major exhibitions in London as I started my research project later in 2015. I came across the exhibition 'The Crime Museum Uncovered: Inside Scotland Yard's Special Collection'[6] quite by accident, having gone to visit the Museum of London to visit a different exhibition. I soon found myself wandering through rooms filled with death masks

[6] 'The Crime Museum Uncovered', Museum of London, 9 October 2015 – 10 April 2016. See also: *The Crime Museum Uncovered: Inside Scotland Yard's Special Collection*, Jackie Keily and Julia Hoffbrand, eds. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).



2. Ruidi Mu, *Untitled (accidental portraits)*, 2011

of criminals and convicts who had been executed at Newgate Prison in the mid-nineteenth century. Other spaces in the exhibition featured an assortment of nooses, including the actual ropes that had been used to hang particular convicts. Each consecutive room introduced new artefacts from crime scenes: gloves, guns, syringes, home-made bomb kits and stained aprons were some of the objects on display. I was interested in how these pieces of evidence retained a kind of stain of the event and how they invoked a sense of what-had-been in the mind, yet their exact history could never be fully known or understood. It recalls Tzvetan Todorov's writing on detective fiction in *The Poetics of Prose*, where he describes the story of the crime as that which tells 'what really happened', whereas 'the story of the investigation explains how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it'[7]. It was this process of *coming to know* as a form of method that I hoped to transpose from the literary world described by Todorov and understand it further within the realm of my photographic practice.

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[7] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 45.

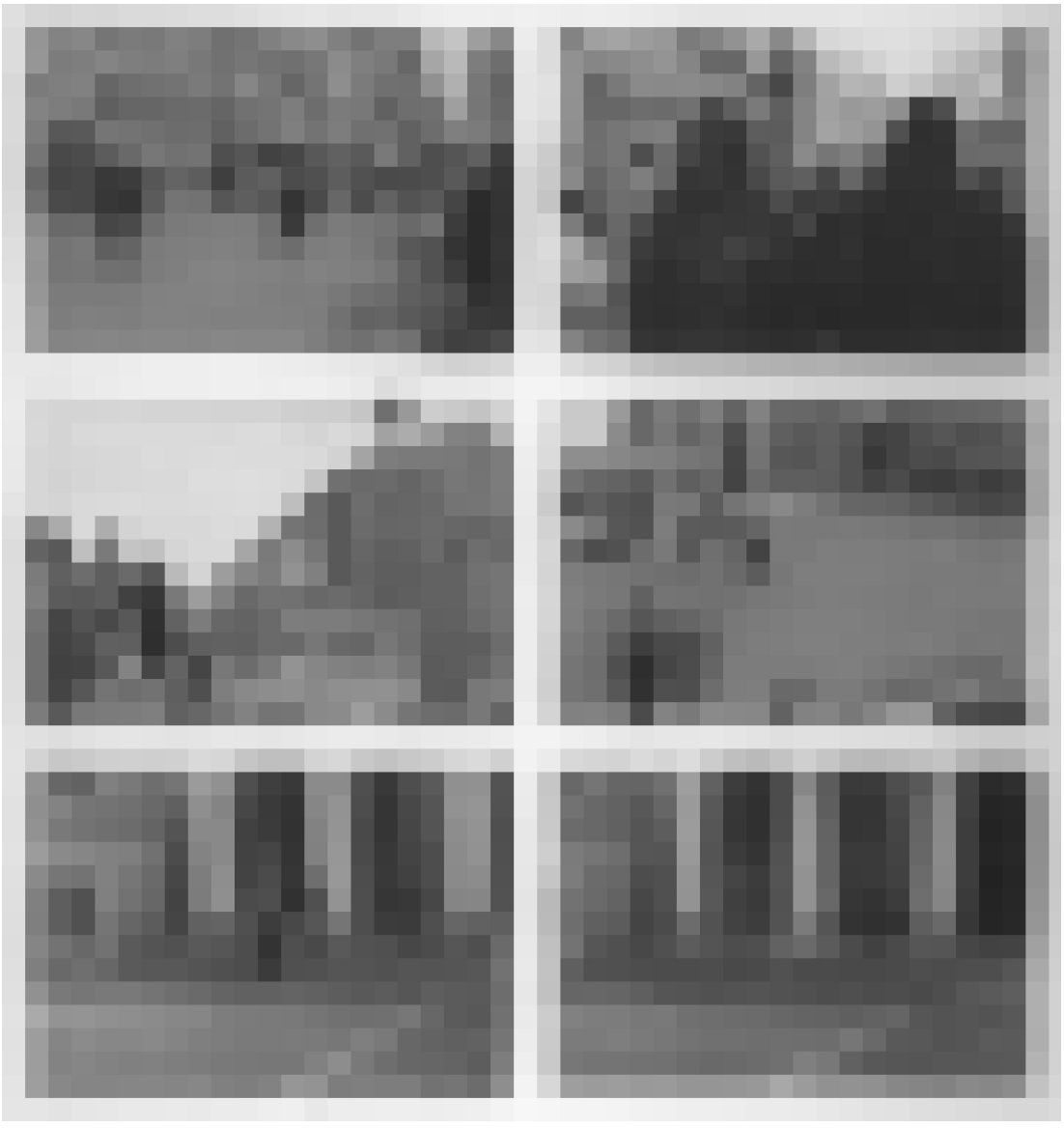
Coinciding with the crime exhibition at the Museum of London was the exhibition 'Burden Of Proof: The Construction of Visual Evidence', showing nearby at The Photographers' Gallery. Similarly, beginning with examples from the nineteenth century – in this case, courtroom images – the show brought together portraits of subjects close to death, aerial landscapes of bombsites and other atrocities. The purpose of the exhibition was to see how these images might speak to a certain history, and how they might offer an insight into the geopolitical contexts of the time and place of the images. While the content of The Photographers' Gallery exhibition was quite different from the artefacts on display at the Museum of London, both pointed to a kind of forensics of looking, and they helped me in the early stages of my research, as I was attempting to understand something about the photographer as a kind of detective and the image as a particular kind of event – a concept which is explored in Chapter One of this thesis: 'The Crime Scene and the Happening'. Both exhibitions pointed me towards the 'gap' in between the-time-of-the-event and the-time-of-viewing-an-image-of-the-event and also the gaps that can exist between images that speak to a certain 'absence' that Todorov describes as being central to the special status of the detective fiction genre.[8] It is this gap that defines my interest in the image-as-evidence.

There are a number of artists interested in exploring the aesthetics of the crime scene – for example, Joel Sternfeld's interesting series *On this Site* (1993-1996), that uses large-format colour photography to capture specific places in which crime scenes have occurred. The works are indeed very

3. Joel Sternfeld, *On this Site*, 1993-1996

[8] Ibid., p. 46.

striking, but also tend to glamorise the crime scene, feeding off the eerie nature of the scenes of events that had taken place in these particular zones of the United States, and, while the subject area is related, this approach differs from the ambitions of my own research practice. Sophie Calle's practice is also related to my thinking – in particular, her 1981 project *The Detective*, in which she asked her mother to hire a detective agent who would follow her around and report back to her with photographic evidence of her daily activities. However, I have chosen not to expand on Calle's work within this thesis for the reason that it tends more strongly towards the construction of narrative within an image, rather than the emphasis on evidence and the clues left behind that encourage the imagination to act. Similarly, the photo-novel by Marie-Françoise Plissart that accompanies Jacques Derrida's text in the book *Right of Inspection* also involves the building up and establishing of narratives and characters



4. Sophie Calle, *The Detective*, 1981

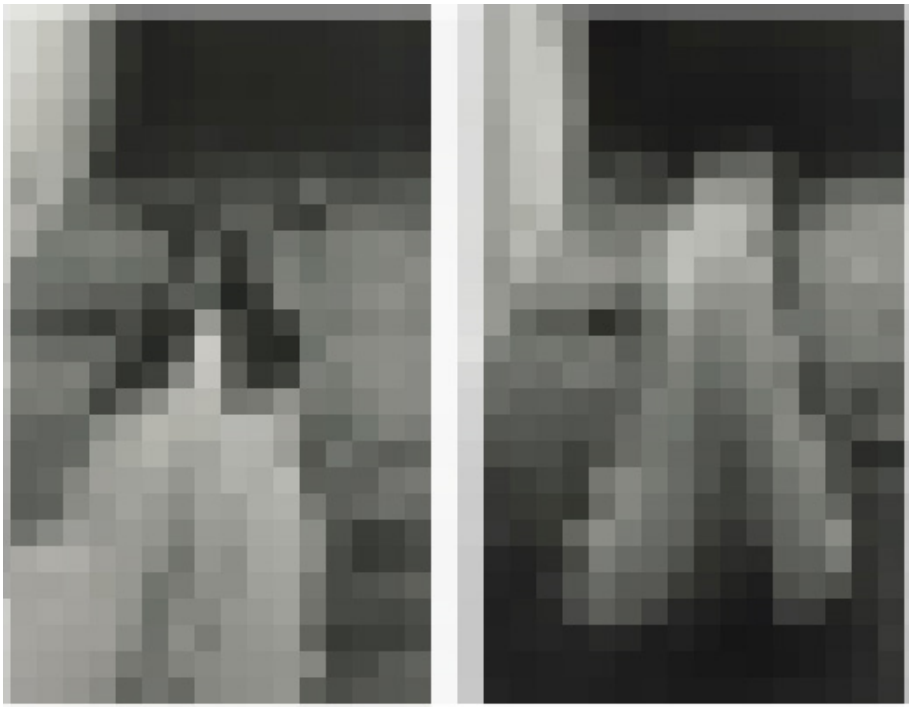
through a compilation of images, and, despite an inclination towards mystery and suggestion, in fact the whole story is contained within the details.[9] For me, the photographic works of Weegee, Mac Adams and the Chinese photographer Jiguang Shen best encapsulate my research enquiry – all work closely with crime scenes, evidence and everyday life, and they are used to support my study of crime scenes and Happenings in Chapter One.

5. Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Right of Inspection*, 1985

[9] Jacques Derrida and Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Right of Inspection*, trans. David Wills (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1998).

During the early stages of my research, a number of exhibitions were also appearing in London which were also apparently relevant to my practice, yet were problematic to me for various reasons. As suggested above, sometimes it is the work you are most critical about that can reveal what it is that you are trying to say – and not say. This was true of two exhibitions held at Tate in 2016, the first being 'Performing For The Camera', which was staged at Tate Modern.[10] While the exhibition and accompanying catalogue offered an analysis of the relationship between documentation and performance, staging and collaboration, performative actions, self-representation and real life, all subjects of particular interest to my own research, I felt that the exhibition failed to successfully deliver on its promise. The heavy-handed curation left little to the imagination, and it felt as though the images were selected in order to push a certain concept, rather than the concept itself being visible in the work.

Only two works stood out to me in this exhibition that was laden with images: one of these was Yves Klein's *Leap into the Void* (1960) which is mentioned in Chapter Two and discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. The other work which caught my eye was a diptych by Paul McCarthy from 1972, titled *Face Painting – Floor, White Line*. In the first image, we see

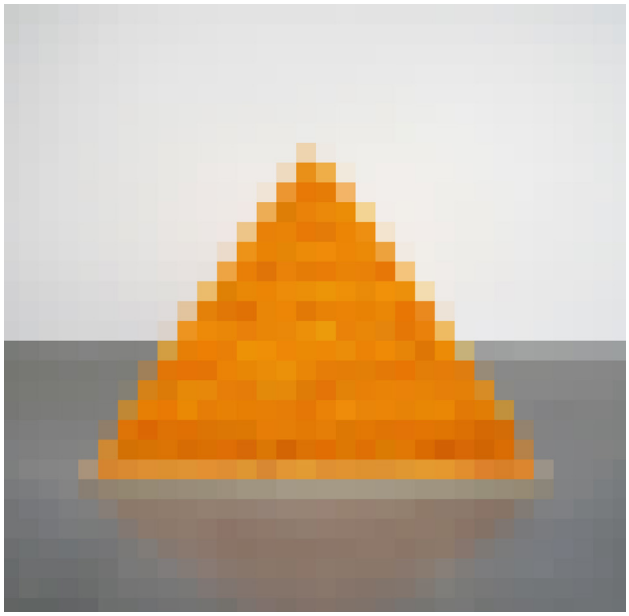


6. Paul McCarthy, *Face Painting – Floor, White Line*, 1972

[10] 'Performing For The Camera', Tate Modern, London, 18 February – 12 June 2016. See also: *Performing For The Camera*, Simon Baker and Fiontan Moran eds., (London: Tate Publishing, 2016).

a figure, presumably the artist, lying face down on a concrete floor, with a train of white paint forming a track under his body, like the residue left behind by a snail. The accompanying image shows the white paint track further down the line, vanishing into the dark shadows at the rear of the scene: the artist is no longer in the picture. This work helped me to understand the particular relationship between photography and Happenings that I was trying to resolve. For me, this work is not a Happening – not in the image, and not in the mind. Its lack of ambiguity and the narrowness of the gap between the two images – the clues are all there on the surface – and the fact that the artist himself is not attempting to make a Happening in the artwork align this piece more with the reinterpretations of painting as a performative act that were prevalent in the work of artists practising in the 1960s and 1970s.

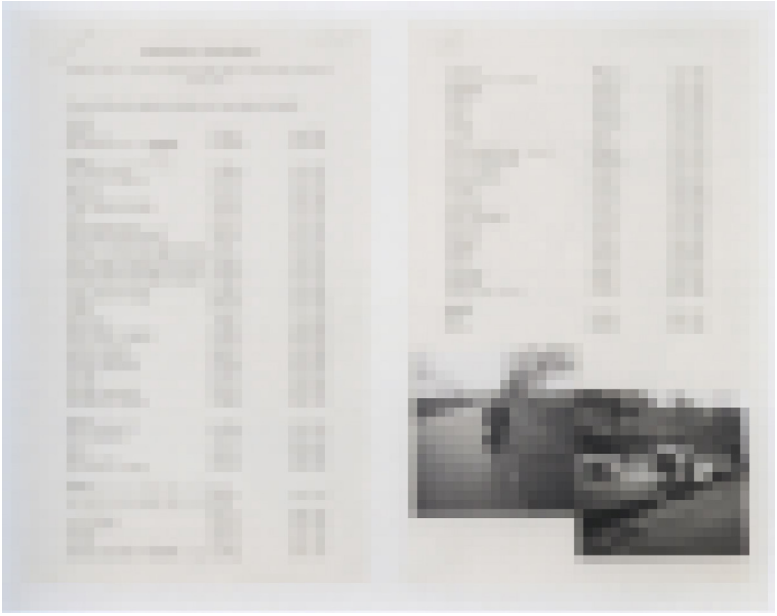
Also in 2016, across the Thames at Tate Britain the major exhibition 'Conceptual Art in Britain 1964-1979' was held.[11] The exhibition was informative in terms of my thinking about the relationship between environment, photography and Happenings. At the entrance to the show was a recreation of Roelof Louw's *Soul City (Pyramid of Oranges)* (1967). While the installation in itself does not particularly relate to my study, the act of recreating an installation from the past raised some important questions for me that I later developed in relation to the restaging of Happenings, as explored in Chapter Three of this thesis. The exhibition also featured a number



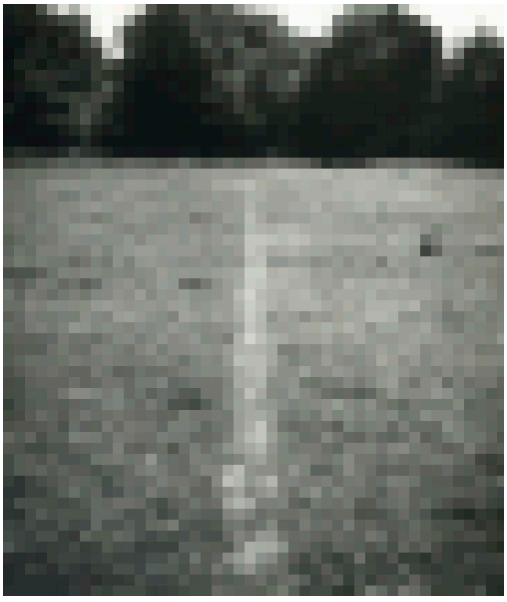
7. Roelof Louw, *Soul City (Pyramid of Oranges)*, 1967

[11] 'Conceptual Art in Britain 1964-1979', Tate Britain, London, 12 April – 29 August 2016. See also: *Conceptual Art in Britain 1964-1979* (London: Tate Publishing, 2016).

of works that were relevant to my thinking at the time, including Hamish Fulton's *Hitchhiking Times from London to Andorra and from Andorra to London, 9-15 April 1967* (1967); Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking* (1967); Victor Burgin's *25 Feet Two Hours* (1969); Sue Arrowsmith's *Untitled* (1970); and Bruce McLean's *Six Sculptures* (1967-8). In their own individual ways, all of these works speak to a relationship between time and the image – they are all time based in the real sense of the term: they all make evident a certain duration of action, presence and of being-there-then.

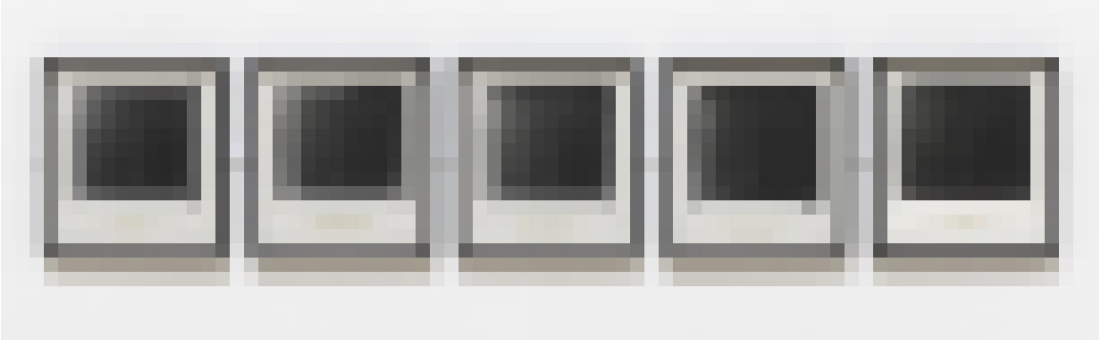


8. Hamish Fulton, *Hitchhiking Times from London to Andorra and from Andorra to London, 9-15 April 1967,* 1967

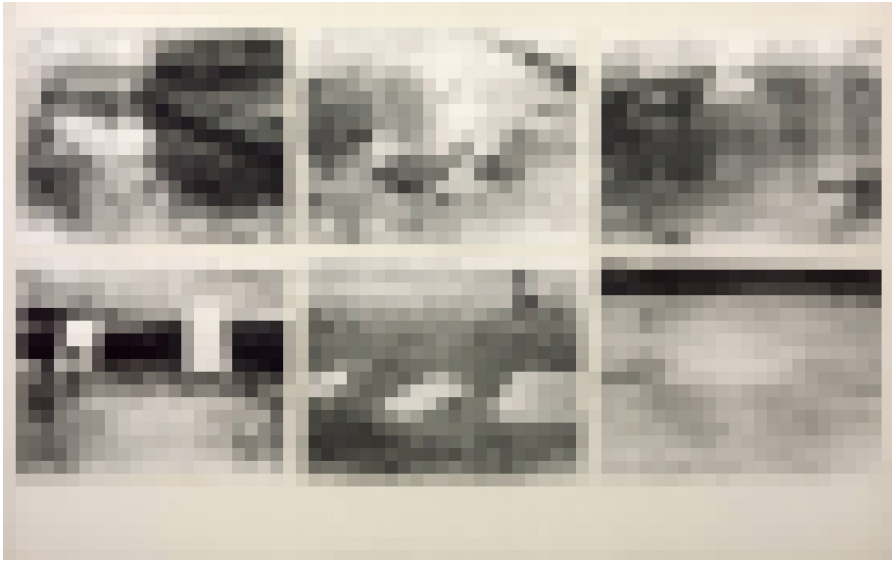


9. Richard Long, *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967

10. Victor Burgin, *25 Feet Two Hours*, 1969



11. Sue Arrowsmith, *Untitled*, 1970



12. Bruce McLean, *Six Sculptures*, 1967-8

Happenings

The Happening as an art concept has always attracted me, not only because of the overlap between the ideas which underpin the form and Eastern philosophy, but also because of its integration of what are commonly seen as areas distinct from each other: life and art. Allan Kaprow, who played a founding role in the rise of the Happening, proposed that art should move out of the museum and into the everyday. Kaprow was a student of John Cage, who was heavily influenced by Buddhist teachings, evident in the artist's works that speak to conditions of impermanency, silence and auditory experience and ideas relating to the 'here and now'.[12] Allan Kaprow describes how in "Cage's cosmology (informed by Asiatic philosophy) the real world was perfect, if we could only hear it, see it, understand it", and how his teaching inspired the development of Happenings:

> …Cage brought the chancy and noisy world into the concert hall (following Duchamp, who did the same in the art gallery), a next step was simply to move right out into that uncertain world and forget the framing devices of concert hall, gallery, stage, and so forth. This was the theoretical foundation of the Happening…[13]

Through erasing the formal structures associated with the presentation of artwork and moving directly into the 'uncertain world', the boundaries between art and life became increasingly blurred, raising such questions as: Could we say art is a part of life? Or that life could be an artistic creation? How do we understand the boundaries between art and life? Or is there no boundary at all?

I was walking along the Thames one day in 2016, and was attracted by a water bird, which I observed for a long time. The bird reminded me of Asian cormorant fishing: a traditional method of fishing where cormorants are trained to fish, by fishermen. In China and other Asian countries, there are records of raising and training water birds to catch fish dating back centuries. Some fishermen still use this method

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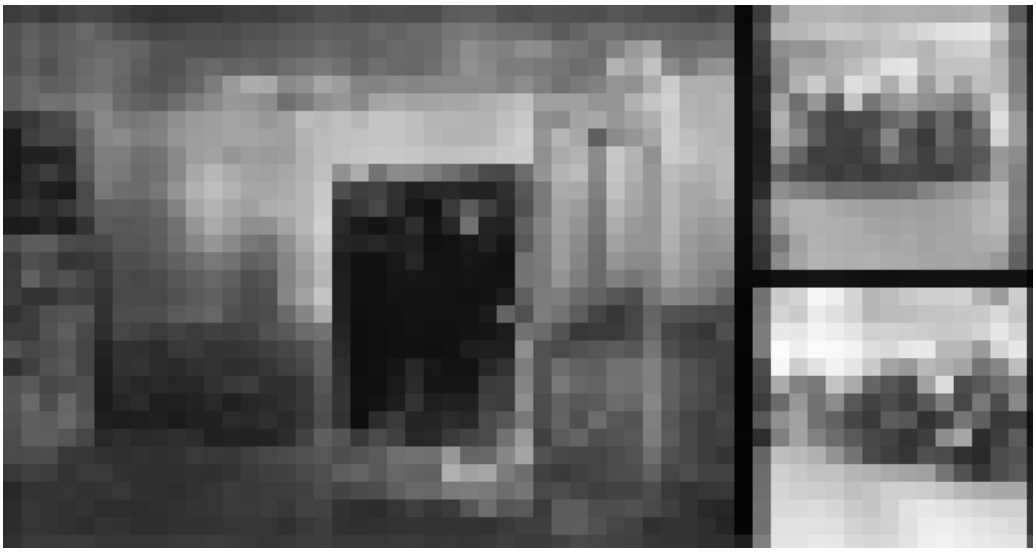
[12] 'Peter Timmerman, 'Uncaged: Buddhism, John Cage and the Freeing of the World', *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies*, 5, (2009), 39-57. http://journals.sfu.ca/cjbs/index.php/cjbs/article/view/58/55 [accessed: 22/01/2016]

[13] Allan Kaprow, 'Right Living (1987)' in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2003), p. 225.

in China today. A fisherman ties a rope around the bird's neck, so that when the bird catches a fish, it cannot swallow its catch, and the bird gives the fish to the fisherman. In this case, it is not the fisherman that fishes then, but rather the bird that is fishing. Yet why do water birds do this? It is their natural instinct to catch fish in order to survive. What is the key to this type of fishing? The key is the rope.

If art is life, or life is art, then the Happening and the creation of art can be seen as a 'natural', or human, instinct. This is similar to the development of the idea of Conceptual art, which demonstrated how anything – material or dematerialised – has the potential to become art. The notion that everything could potentially become a work of art is like the water bird's instinct for fishing, and it is that rope that makes the potential happen. This 'rope' could be many different forms in different contexts. It could be the environment, or an event. In Cage's work *4'33"*, for example, the rope is in the title: the duration of the work. Like the cormorant which is unable to swallow and holds onto the fish, the brackets of this portable composition hold onto a few minutes of the immediate environment, transforming the everyday into a work of art. Similarly, in Kaprow's early Happenings, the audience would receive an invitation with instructions that offered a guide as to how and when to perceive 'the work'. For example, on the night of the performance of *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959), each member of the audience received a card printed with the following:

The performance is divided into six parts. Each part contains three happenings



13. Allan Kaprow, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, 1959

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[14] Allan Kaprow, progamme notes for *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, as quoted in RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art from Futurism to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrahams, 1988), p. 129.

which occur at once. The beginning and end will be signalled by a bell. At the end of the performance two stroke of the bell will be heard.[14]

In this instant, it is the bell that becomes the rope. In my work, and in the pages of this thesis, my ambition is to discuss the relationship between photography and Happenings, as well as how photography becomes the 'rope', the virtual line that generates Happenings in art and life. The rope is also a limitation, like the rules of a game. The rope is also the link between 'art, life and me' – drawing together objects, images, moments and encounters, in order to make something visible, or in other words, to deliver 'the fish'. When the rope is untied from the bird's neck, it is once again able to swallow and devour the fish. It is only for a certain period of time that the bird becomes the fisherman. Similarly, all of the examples above are dependent on a certain relationship to time and to capturing the time of an event.

Time is like the river that never stops, and all living individuals are the floating boats on the river. There is a Chinese fable called *Nick the Boat to Seek the Sword*. The story is about a passenger who dropped his treasured sword into the river, but he did not salvage the sword right away. Instead, he made a mark on the edge of the boat where the sword dropped. When the boat reached land, he jumped into the water and tried to find his sword according to the mark he made, but of course he found nothing, because the boat had moved with the river, but the sword was still. People frequently try to arrest time, or keep memories fresh. We adopt all kinds of ways to record time: words, painting, photographs, calendars, and the list continues. Before the invention of photography, people could only try to record events by making paintings or writing to retain the significance, likeness or memory of events or people. These written words and images became stories, documents or histories. With the invention of photography came the ability to record an actual moment, to 'fix' that moment forever, or for as long as the photograph existed.

If the boat and sword story had taken place at the present time, and someone had happened to take a photograph at the moment when the sword was dropped, this image would have recorded what happened in that moment. The photograph would be different from the mark on the boat because of its independent existence, its existence that is not affected by the 'river'. Yet there is a similarity – both the photographic image and the cut in the side of the boat attest to the existence of the sword. This photograph may not help that person find the sword, or it could if it showed the position of the boat on the river, but the existence of the photograph holds onto that moment in time like the rope holding onto the fish in the neck of the cormorant.

Photography as ~~Performance~~ Happening

In his 1958 essay 'The Legacy of Jackson Pollock', Allan Kaprow first mentions the idea of the Happening. He writes:

> Not only will these bold creators show us, as if for the first time, the world we have always had about us but ignored, but they will disclose entirely unheard-of happenings and events, found in garbage cans, police files, hotel lobbies; seen in store windows and on the streets; and sensed in dreams and horrible accidents.[15]

According to Kaprow, a Happening was 'a game, an adventure, a number of activities engaged in by participants for the sake of playing'.[16] He describes the Happenings as 'events that, put simply, happen'.[17] Kaprow states that craftsmanship and performance should be forgotten, and calls for a greater use of perishable materials in art. This so-called 'concrete art'[18], as Kaprow terms it, should employ ingredients familiar in everyday life, such as paint, chairs, food, lights, smoke, water, and other frequently encountered materials.

In 1959, Kaprow used the word 'Happening' to describe a state of creation; he distinguishes the Happening here as a state, rather than an art form. This state of creation is contrary to the principles associated with traditional art production such as skill and a lasting object or product with a permanent presence. As a new art concept, the word Happening referred specifically to "a collage of rather abstract events for moveable audiences"[19] and it was Kaprow's ambition that art could become an event for everyone to take part in during the 1960s. The Happening offered a continuation and development of collage art and environmental art, with activities such as recreating a space using sculpture or inviting the participation of the viewer/audience through the act of cutting out a poster.

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[15] Allan Kaprow, 'The Legacy of Jackson Pollock (1958)' in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2003), p.9.

[16] Allan Kaprow, handwritten note for *Watching*, 1967, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 12, folder 8), cited in: Allan Kaprow, *Art as Life*, Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk and Stephanie Rosenthal eds. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008), p.68.

[17] Ibid., p.26.

[18] See: Kaprow, 1958, pp.1-9.

[19] Kaprow, 2003, p. xxvii.

However, Happenings differed from collage and environmental practices because of the manner in which they focused on the randomness of the work itself, instead of the physical form of the work and the way it was displayed. A Happening is an improvisation, and the expressions are mainly spontaneous events that have no specific plot or environment.

A 'Happening' as Kaprow conceived of it is a broad concept; the artist can capture any moment in life according to his or her own wishes to create a work, and artists can also specify certain acts as their art. The Happening was an attempt to create an art form that could resist the constraints of the commercial gallery system by existing outside of the strictures of the art museum.

Before Kaprow formally identified and named Happenings as an art concept, similar ideas had been circulating amongst artists. As mentioned above, Kaprow was a student of the composer John Cage, and Kaprow had been influenced by Cage's 'musical happenings'. Cage himself had been influenced and inspired by the Japanese author and Buddhist scholar D.T. Suzuki, and he went on to study Zen and the I Ching and other writings of Eastern philosophy. These influences allowed Cage to develop a kind of art that was not discordant with life, but instead was an art built out of the actions of the everyday world.

Cage's ideas are clearly influenced by the teachings in Eastern philosophy, in particular the idea that all contact arises from fate and that changes are unpredictable and uncontrollable, instead of pre-ordained. When these ideas that allow for serendipity are brought to bear on an artistic practice, improvisation and chance become the driving forces of production, rather than pre-planned actions. In 1966, Kaprow gave a 'lecture' about how to make a Happening, which was then released as an LP record entitled *How to Make a Happening*. In the lecture, Kaprow provides an introduction

14. Allan Kaprow, *How to Make a Happening* [LP cover], Mass Art Inc., 1964

to the rules of 'the game'. First of all, he provides a list of things that should not be done during a Happening, such as the painting of pictures, the writing of plays or poetry, the filming of movies and the building of architecture. Almost every form that traditionally relates to art and culture is on Kaprow's list. Then he gives the first rule: "Make something new, something that doesn't even remotely remind you of culture". Kaprow goes on to describe the idea of 'mixing up' Happenings with life, to 'make it unclear' whether the happening is life or art. Kaprow insists that "The situations for a happening should come from what you see in the real world, from real places and people rather than from the head." Claiming that the imagination plays a central role in art production, Kaprow warns that "if you stick to imagination too much you'll end up with old art again". Making the Happening from situations from the real world is like using 'ready-made' materials to make an artwork, as in Pop Art or collage, but without the introduction of the imagination. In the section where Kaprow considers temporality, he declares: "Break up your time and let it be real time. Real time is found when things are going on in real places… whatever happens should happen in its natural time".[20] In his essay from the same year, 'The Happenings Are Dead: Long Live the Happenings (1966)' Kaprow describes the emancipatory potential of the Happening:

> Happenings, freed from the restrictions of conventional art materials, have discovered the world at their fingertips, and the intentional results are quasi-rituals, never to be repeated. Unlike the "cooler" styles of Pop, Op, and Kinetics, in which imagination is filtered through a specialized medium and a privileged showplace, the Happenings do not merely allude to what is going on in our bedrooms, in the drugstores, and at the airports; they are right there.[21]

On the subject of the performer, Kaprow states that they 'don't need to be a professional' because 'it is artless'.[22] This will make the Happening more natural, more like the real world and not a work of art. In the lecture *How to Make a Happening*, Kaprow also gives his opinion about how many times the Happening work should be performed, which is 'once only', unlike a painting or other art forms that can be remade or exhibited in a different place. Happenings come from the everyday, and are associ-

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[20] Allan Kaprow, *How to Make a Happening*, Mass Art Inc., 1964. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iCM-YIjyHE [accessed: 21/10/2015]

[21] Allan Kaprow, 'The Happenings Are Dead: Long Live the Happenings (1966)' in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2003), pp.64-65.

[22] Kaprow, 1964.

ated with where it happens, when it happens, and who is involved. A Happening cannot be a copy, but you can always make another Happening. At the end of the lecture, Kaprow notes that the relation between Happenings and audiences is not like the theatre: a Happening is not a show, not a play, but a ‘game’. There cannot be someone just outside watching, the audience has ‘got to be involved physically’.[23]

[23] Ibid.

Rope around the bird's throat

Kaprow's game is the springboard for my own research and practice that seeks to reimagine the space of the Happening through the lens of photography. I see the connection between my research, my writing and my practice as being akin to that moment when the rope is around the bird's throat. The rules of the game are mobile and they are always shifting, yet what I hope to ultimately share is an understanding of the potential dynamics between the rock, the paper and the scissors and how this might offer a new contribution to practice-led research into subjectivity, and artworks which interrogate the borders between art and life.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter One: *The Crime Scene and the Happening* begins to establish the connection I am making between photographic work and imaginary actions. An experience from the everyday is captured in two images – effectively, a before and an after. This diptych becomes the catalyst for an investigation of crime scene photography and the image-as-evidence. This study allows for the concept of photographic Happenings to be developed by highlighting the works of three photographers who demonstrate different kinds of forensic approaches to the making of images: Weegee's crime scene photographs, the vast majority of which are murder scenes; Mac Adam's *Mysteries series*, in which the artist created a series of works about fictional crime scenes, using installation and photography; and Chinese photographer Jiguang Shen's documentary images, which work like an archive of everyday life, his work focusing on the element in life which is about to vanish or has already disappeared. By using such material to discuss and explore a certain relationship between clues and the image, I begin to articulate the notion of a conceptual photographic Happening, an event which only exists in the mind of the viewer.

The notion of the image-as-evidence and the act of photography as a tool for understanding something of a personal cultural journey, as revealed in the work of Shen, are further explored in ***Chapter Two:*** *Everything About Newcastle*. This chapter is written in a personal, narrative style, one which takes the reader on a journey that follows my own personal journey from London to Newcastle, with flashbacks to my homeland in Dandong, China. The chapter outlines a photographic project completed as part of my research, which began in the summer of 2015 and was completed in 2018. This journey proves significant in terms of the consideration of photography and affect that is central to this PhD. In particular, the work explored in Chapter Two allows me to offer a study of the identity of the artist and the relationship between temporality and the image, memory and neglect. Maurice Blanchot is a key reference, with a focus on his writing on community and absence, and the impossibility of shared experience. This chapter also continues the study of photographic evidence, documenting a first-hand situation that is shown to have an effect on the recording of history in newspapers in both the UK and China. The ambition of this chapter is also to highlight a certain relationship between uncertainty and the image in order to develop the study of the connection between Happenings, unrepeatable events, temporality, gaps and the image.

Chapter Three: *The Daily Mirror* extends the study of the Happening, the unrepeatable event and the question of the boundaries between art and life. Where Chapter Two describes a situation in which everyday events from my own life have had an impact on news stories, Chapter Three offers a consideration of a more intimate experience with news reports and how they have mirrored my everyday life. If the previous chapter is like throwing a rock in a lake and creating some waves, Chapter Three is more akin to me being a bug on that lake, caught up in the rippling current. The four artworks that form the basis of this chapter are *Summer Laundry* (2016); *The Friendship within the Golden Era* (2016); *The Golden Experience* (2018) and *The Daily Mirror* (2018-19). While distinctly different works, each considers a relationship between news events, personal experience and ideas relating to refraction, reflection and response. Works by the artist-duo Broomberg & Chanarin are discussed as an example of contemporary artists responding in a performative manner to the daily news, and the Taiwanese artist Tehching Hsieh is considered in terms of his particular relationship with the everyday and the performance of everyday life.

My position is that artist's identity is not something that can be held, like an identity card. It is not fixed; rather, it is in a continual process of becoming. Through this research, I want to question if it is possible for an artist's identity to be shared. Perhaps this kind of relationship between an artist and their audience is impossible, yet this study points towards the meanings that can be generated in the pursuit of such connections. It is the struggle in between two points, between the mirror and its reflection, the camera and the print, a sign and its object – where meaning is made, broken and remade.

Rock. Paper. Scissors.

CHAPTER ONE:
THE CRIME SCENE AND THE HAPPENING
(the gaps in between and the unrepeatable moment)

Lunch Time Nap
Potatoes

I have always felt that you should never make a decision following a lunchtime nap. There is something about this space and time, a kind of momentary discordance with the world, that seems particular to this break in the day. It is difficult to define, yet quite distinct from the moment of waking up in the morning. The lunchtime nap is a kind of disruption – to consciousness, to daily life – and in its wake the world can appear quite strange: dreamlife and real life can appear confusingly intertwined, producing a fictitious dreamland that can infect the remainder of the day.

It was during the strange light of a lunchtime nap one day that the object of my lunch – a single potato – spoke to me in an unexpected way. The baked potato for lunch struck me as a particularly British tradition. I recalled being quite startled once, having encountered a technician in the Photography department preparing his midday meal one day. Holding the vegetable in one hand, he proceeded to stab it quite forcefully with the top of a fork, piercing the skin. I felt as though I had walked into a murder scene, and later tried this at home. *Potatoes* is a diptych I made in 2015 depicting a scene from one of these lunches, and this work became the catalyst for my PhD research. Two images sit side by side, each depicting a solitary potato on a round plate. In the first image, the potato is raw, freshly washed, waiting. In the second image, the potato is in a similar position on the plate, yet now it has evidently been through a process of cooking, as its skin is wrinkled and deflated, like that of an old man.

There was something in the gap between these two images that was fascinating to me. Something which I felt was central to my research questions. Looking at these two images, it was clear that there was a ‘before’ and an ‘after’. The photographs revealed not only a shift in time, but also that something had ‘happened’ in between. There was something about the simplicity of the gesture, the sheer obviousness of it all, that got me thinking about the relationship between photography, time and Happenings.

15. Ruidi Mu, *Potatoes*, 2015

When people see a cooked potato, they think, ‘Somebody is going to eat it’, or perhaps, ‘How did someone cook it?’ When people see the image of a cooked potato, they might think, ‘Somebody will have eaten it’, or, similarly, question the method of cooking. The way an image is read depends on prior knowledge about the objects or events in the image, coupled with the memory of experience.

When you see *Potatoes*, what do you think? Perhaps straightforwardly, you might think ‘I see two potatoes’. So perhaps we might ask, ‘Do you think about what has been done to this potato?’ The answer might be, ‘Cooked in a microwave or oven’. And why? ‘Of course, this is for someone to eat’. What you may not consider perhaps, is the fact that these might be two different potatoes, one cooked, and one raw, photographed on the same plate, on the same benchtop, on two different days. The presentation of the images as they are draws on our familiarity with the ‘before and after’ image. And perhaps it is of no significance if these two potatoes are not identical, yet appear to be – however, it may force a consideration of the accountability of images. Through formal comparisons we assume a connection, therefore we also assume that we understand what has happened, or taken place, in the gap between the two images. This is perhaps especially so in the case of the baked potato, a staple of everyday life. What is also significant here is the shift from potatoes to *Potatoes*, or, in other words, from an action from everyday life into a Happening, through the process of becoming an artwork.

And it was through these two potatoes that the central proposition of my research emerged: *What if, through the process of photography, a Happening could be made to take place in the space of imagination?*

Photography itself contains a contradiction in time and space, in that there is both a ‘before’ and ‘after’ of the moment of the image, as well as another temporal shift that occurs during the time of viewing. A photographic

work is always 'out of time', in this sense. Thinking of photography in light of Derrida's thoughts on literature, where 'that which is written is never identical to itself',[24] then could it also be argued that the time of an artwork occurs in the mind of the viewer at the moment of encounter with an image – and that it is different every time? Could a photograph effect a kind of Happening that occurs not through that which it represents, but through the process of thinking it sets forth in the imagination? And if this is the case, that the Happening takes place not on the surface of the image but as an imagining, then who is the author of the work – or could there even be a shared authorship? I was particularly interested in the potential for this participatory relationship between my images and the viewers of these works. And it seemed to me that it was essential that these questions emerged from moments of everyday experience, like the lunchtime potato, that through the process of photography could activate a Happening in the mind. Considered in this light, the Happening – and together with it this shared experience of artistic consciousness – could possibly happen at any time. Sparked by the moment of an image of the everyday, and then transported back into everyday life.

If we take a close look at the word 'imagination' itself, it already contains the word 'image' within it. Yet, unlike the fixity of the image, the imagination is elusive. If it were even possible to harness, a captured imagination would render itself like idiotic nonsense or the ravings of a lunatic. The imagination is a very attractive thing precisely because it is free, it is uncontrollable; it has no uniform answer and no fixed, recorded method or state. Within my own art practice and in the pages of this thesis, I see the imagination as more like a catalyst in an alchemical experiment; it is the indispensable ingredient that can be provoked, through photography, in order to turn an everyday experience into an artwork that takes place in the mind.

While the purpose of my research is not to define the imagination, or to identify the vision of each person as different, a key concern of this PhD is to explore and investigate whether an imaginary action could be identified as a Happening, and, through doing so, to reimagine the space of the Happening through the lens of photography.

Within my research, photography becomes a starting point for triggered imagination – it is the foundation underlying the potential conceptual performance that happens. When one looks at a photograph of a cooked po-

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[24] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, (Routledge: London and New York, 2005), p.29.

tato that they imagine someone else will eat, simultaneously comprehending that someone must also have cooked it, without seeing the action of eating or cooking, then the imagination has worked to precipitate an action in the mind, and I wonder if this imagined action could be a Happening.

Crime Scenes, Photography, and Happenings

Since its inception in the late nineteenth century, photography has been used as a tool to record crime scenes and identify criminals. As with the Happening, the crime scene is something that occurs in real life that cannot be repeated. Both Happenings and crime scenes have a particular relationship to photography: both use the camera as a tool to record the evidence of that which has occurred. In the example of the crime scene, however, it is most generally the case that the image records the what-has-happened, rather than the Happening in action. We could compare this to Roland Barthes' description in *Camera Lucida* of the photograph as 'extended, loaded evidence' that leaves behind a trace of the 'that has been'.[25] Continuing this study of the particular relationship between temporality and the image, Laura Mulvey, in *Death 24x a Second*, describes the photograph's 'privileged relation to time, preserving the moment at which the image is registered, inscribing an unprecedented reality into its representation of the past'.[26] In this sense, the photographic evidence of the crime scene could be compared to the cooked potato. Both reveal an 'after' in which the viewer of the photograph must imagine the events which transpired before the image was taken. The borders of the image work to frame evidence in a particular way. The question that this thesis is pursuing is: *Can the action of viewing the 'that-has-been' of the photograph be understood as a contemporary form of Happening?* – a relational and subjective form of Happening that occurs and re-occurs in the mind of the viewer upon every encounter with the image. Perhaps this could be considered an impossible form of resuscitation, whereby the viewer brings the dead image to life through a Happening which is an accumulation of the image + the moment of looking + the perceiving subject.

> All those young photographers who are at work in the world, determined upon the capture of actuality, do not know that they are agents of Death… For Death must be somewhere in a society; if it is no longer (or less intensely) in religion, it must be elsewhere; perhaps in this image which produces Death while trying to preserve life… *Life / Death*: the paradigm is reduced to a simple click, the one separating the initial pose from the final print.[27]

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[25] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography,* trans. Richard Howard, (London: Vintage Classics, date), p.115.

[26] Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, (London: Reaktion, date), p.9.

[27] Barthes, p. 92.

The simple click that Barthes describes in *Camera Lucida* speaks to the gap between life and the image, or life and death. The photograph becomes like a kind of death mask – and this idea was also explored by Susan Sontag in *On Photography*: she wrote that 'all photographs are memento mori that enable participation in another's mortality'.[28] It is this aspect of participation that is crucial to my study, this form of active looking as opposed to a passive gaze – and the identification of what happens in the space of this action of viewing and how this might reanimate, not life, but a previous moment in time – one which is trapped within the frame of the image.

Can all photographs then, be considered to invoke a Happening? This is not the claim of my thesis, in the same way that not all experiences from everyday life are considered a Happening. However, I argue that the *photographic Happening* might occur through two different types of work, the first being the artist's ambition to create a Happening through the image, in so doing creating works that exploit the gap, the space between now and then. The potato is a simple example of this practice. The second potential for the photographic Happening can be found in the particular example of images that explicitly function as forms of evidence, and for this reason I am focusing on the example of crime scene photography.

If we assume that a crime itself is an event that cannot be copied, the crime and the Happening are analogous. Most viewers of images of crime scenes would not have been present at the scene of the crime. Through documentary reportage, the viewer is offered a window through which to consider the investigation and analysis of what has occurred. Within this process of cognition, the imagination will reproduce the criminals' actions in the mind as the viewer attempts to piece together the evidence. This is of course an entirely subjective experience, and different viewers may have completely different ideas of the same photograph. And yet the truth has only one version, and for those who were not the criminal, the victim, or a direct witness, the image becomes a crucial 'eye' into the scene. Similarly, in the case of Happenings, we understand a certain view of what occurred through the documentation that remains after the event. These unrepeatable acts become immortalised in the image, forming a new kind of Happening – a forensic act of viewing that occurs upon each subsequent encounter with the image.

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[28] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 154.

Murder is my business.[29]

The photographer and photojournalist Weegee worked in Manhattan during the 1930s and 40s, and his work is renowned for its candid depictions of urban living and crime scenes involving injuries and death. The monograph of his work, *Murder is My Business*, contains an archive of the numerous photographs that Weegee captured, which he later sold to popular newspaper outlets. Due to his infamous speed, not only appearing at the scene of the crime in record time but also famously having a complete darkroom in the boot of his car, much of what the public learned about criminals at the time was through Weegee's photographs. Among the many works by Weegee there is one extraordinary photograph that continues to catch my attention, one which I feel is particularly relevant to this thesis. *Victim of Gang Stuffed in Trunk* was an image captured by Weegee on the 5th of August 1938, and published by the *New York Post* on the same day.

It is not just the fact that this image features the photographer himself that makes this image so startling. What makes this photograph so different from the others is that there are two different versions of the image. In the original version, Weegee is inspecting a trunk containing the body of William Hessler, who had been stabbed to death in Brooklyn. In the second, doctored version which appeared in the major newspapers at the time, Weegee has used darkroom techniques to remove the body from the image, in order to make the image suitable for a public audience, as the news editors deemed the image too horrifying for popular consumption. So what we are left with is a portrait of the photographer, staring into what appears

16. Weegee, *Victim of Gang Stuffed in Trunk*, 1936

[29] Weegee, 'Murder is My Business' in Weegee and Brian Wallis, *Murder is my Business* (New York: International Center of Photography, 2012), p. 9.

to be an empty trunk, under the headline: 'Trunk in which slain man was found'.[30] Weegee stares into the apparently empty trunk, which before the photographic manipulation clearly displayed the curled up dead figure of a man, tied with rope. However, for the viewers of the image as it was printed in the popular press, the body is an invisible ghost which needs to be imagined through the process of looking.

> They made a fine art of it. Each murder was better than the one previous.
> –'Mike Wallace Asks Weegee: Is Murder a Dying Art?', 4 March 1958.[31]

Perhaps we might consider Weegee's process of creating this image as a series of performances, and the eventual final photograph as a documentation of that performance. Yet what the viewer sees in the image is not the actual event itself, but rather a restaging of the event. Potential and narrative are embedded within the manipulated photograph. The image itself reveals a familiar environment: an anonymous yet typical roadside scene, with rambling plants rising out of the earth. It is the kind of classic location that is used in fictional crime dramas – there is a sense of foreboding about the site, as if something bad is about to happen, or something terrible is going to be unearthed from the bushes.

Of course, Weegee's image would have been accompanied by a newspaper report which would have given details about this particular murder, and this would have worked to frame the imaginings of the reader/viewer to some extent. The action of the murder may happen in the mind of the spectator when they read the newspaper, and perhaps more vividly when they encounter the picture. Viewing the final image, one would believe the body was removed by the police, and in this light Weegee appears in the form of a detective who is looking for evidence. In this example, the photographer's manipulation of both the scene and the image works to create an untrue vision, one which leads to a fictional narrative that only exists in the mind of the viewer, and each one of these narratives could be different, like a personal, internalised Happening in the mind of each individual. No matter which way you read the image, you will get it wrong. The clues just don't add up.

How is photography revivified by the imagination? The American critic Nancy Princenthal writes:

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[30] Ibid., pp. 64-67.

[31] Ibid., p.30.

> While the medium has lost some authority as both reliable witness and convincing falsifier (it is clear that photographs lie, though maybe not so well as digital images), it has become an especially interesting place to explore the tangled relationships among history, fiction, and representation.[32]

A single image can only provide limited visual information, and despite our knowledge that photographs can be deceiving, it is quite odd that typically people continue to trust in images. The photographic image controls the audience's gaze, and provides a particular environment that can be both real and fictional. As Princenthal notes, 'the viewer is led forcibly into interpretative overdrive, pursuing leads that work like evidence but look like art, the two terms mirroring each other with diabolically confounding allure'.[33]

In the case of film photography, the experience when an artist takes, processes and prints an image is very personal, and the method of creating an image, such as developing film and print, is more akin to a selfish romance in which the experience cannot be shared. The darkroom is a strange place, an intensely personal site where the photographer makes the image into something that can be seen again. And this new vision is similarly intensely personal and one-sided. As Reyner Banham writes in his review of *Parallel of Art and Life* (1953):

> Truth may be stranger than fiction, but many of the camera's statements are stranger than truth itself. We tend to forget that every photograph is an artefact, a document recording forever a momentary construction based upon reality.[34]

Looking at a photograph gives people an experience distinct from reality. The image provides a frame through which we might perceive things which are ordinarily overlooked. It is often assumed that we never really see anything until it has been photographed. The imaging process makes its subject truly visible, it imports a certain sense of value and declares that this something is worth looking at. As Vilém Flusser writes in *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, photographers 'create, process and store symbols'.[35]

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[32] Nancy Princenthal, in Mac Adams, *Mac Adams: Beyond a Shadow of a Doubt* (Nantes: Musées de Châteauroux, 2004), p.121. [30] Ibid., pp. 64-67.

[33] Adams, p. 125.

[34] Reyner Banham, 'Parallel of Life and Art', *Architectural Review* (October 1953), pp. 259-61.

[35] Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion, 2014), p.25.

Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 film *Blow-Up* is about a successful London fashion photographer, Thomas, who discovers something suspicious in the shots he has taken of lovers in a desolate park. Thomas may have unwittingly photographed a murder, but he does not realise this until he studies the photographs and blows up his negatives. The photographer tries to deconstruct the image and constitute the picture again with more detail. This action follows a series of scenes about looking, and what can be seen. At the beginning of the film, Thomas goes to visit his neighbour, who is a painter, and when he looks at one of the artist's recent paintings, he tries to read it and says, 'It's like finding a clue in a detective story'. Later in the film, when he tells his friend about the possible murder that he has found in his photograph, they have an absorbing conversation about it, one which recalls a kind of absurdist theatre:

> Thomas: I saw a man killed this morning.
> Painter: Where?
> Thomas: Shot.
> …
> Painter: Who was he?
> Thomas: Someone.
> Painter: How did it happen?
> Thomas: I don't know, I didn't see.
> Painter: You didn't see.
> Thomas: No.

17. Michelangelo Antonioni, *Blow-Up*, 1966

And at the end of the film, Thomas meets his publisher, Ron, and they have a very short dialogue. The publisher senses that the photographer is uneasy, that something is not quite right.

> Ron: What's the matter with him? What did you see in that park?
> Thomas: Nothing.[36]

The film has told the story of a possible murder, but one that only exists as it would appear in the photograph, and whether it has actually taken place or not is ambiguous. Thomas does not see the actual crime, he only finds out about it when he looks at his photographs. When his friends ask about the details of what happened he clearly does not know, and yet his photographs mean he does have some knowledge of the event. What results is the discovery of previously undisclosed physical facts about the world, made evident through the world of the image. It is a kind of deceptive doubling of the world, one which Rosalind Krauss describes in her writing on Surrealism and photography: 'the photographic medium is exploited to produce a paradox: the paradox of reality constituted as sign – or presence transformed into absence…'[37]

Blow-Up asks us not only to ponder the paradoxical nature of the photographic image but also to question whether it is the photographer or his camera that makes the image. Is the image that which was viewed at the time of the event, or is it that which is apparent in the grains or pixels of the subsequent print? Or, in other words, what is the time of the image? Is it the before (the event) or the after (the time of the viewer)? The murder that occurs in *Blow-Up* is clearly a fiction, because it occurs within a cinematic narrative. Within this fictional world, the murder is also potentially a fiction. Like the example of Weegee above, the photographer (Thomas) becomes implicated in the scene of the crime. Where Weegee physically appears in his crime scene through a process of photographic manipulation, Thomas's crime scene appears to him through the photographic process in the darkroom. In both cases the murder scene seems to appear most clearly in the photographers' imaginations. The actual murders, whether they occurred or not, remain invisible, beyond the frame. The split between experience and image is unsettling.

In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes describes a moment when he encounters an image of himself which seems unrecognisable. He does not recall the

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[36] *Blow-Up*, dir: Michelangelo Antonioni, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, (1966).

[37] Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1997), p. 112.

time of the image, nor the event that was photographed. Barthes inspects the photograph for evidence, yet constantly fends off total denial simply because of the fact that he is looking at a photograph, therefore it surely must-have-been. Barthes refers to Antonioni's film in his description of this moment of encountering himself as a stranger in the image:

> …*because it was a photograph*, I could not deny that I had been *there* (even if I did not know *where*). This distortion between certainty and oblivion gave me a kind of vertigo, something of a 'detective' anguish (the theme of *Blow-Up* was not far off); I went to the photographer's show as to a police investigation, to learn at last what I no longer knew about myself.[38]

The photography of the British artist Mac Adams poses similar questions to those asked in Antonioni's film. In his early work, specifically the *Mysteries* series, Adams tries to create a series of fictional crime stories, but instead of using text he uses photographs to approach the narrative. The series is predominantly comprised of diptychs, working together as a pair to form a 'before' and 'after' narrative, and in the space between the two images it becomes apparent that a crime has transpired. At the same time as Adams was making his *Mystery* photographic works, he was also creating his *Mystery* installations, which were large room-sized and site-specific scenes of fictional crimes. These episodes reveal just the 'after', with no 'before'. It is clear that something terrible has happened: furniture is upset and in disarray in one scene, an overflowing bath is marked with splatters of blood in another. The viewer-cum-detective is left to gather the clues and imagine what-has-been. Unlike Weegee's crime photographs, Adams' works are based on invented crime stories – the artist suggests a narrative, or a mysterious theme or atmosphere, to try to stimulate the viewers' imagination. In both instances, however, something is left out of the frame, and the narrative can only be resolved, or at least imagined, in the mind of the viewer.

> …no decision is really 'decisive', but part of a series of clear and distinct quantum-decisions, likewise only a series of photographs can testify to the photographer's intention. For no single photograph is actually decisive; even the 'final decision' finds itself reduced to a grain in the photograph…. The act of photography is like going on a hunt in which photographer and camera merge into one indivisible function.[39]

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[38] Barthes, p. 85.

[39] Flusser, p.39.

18. Mac Adams, *Mysteries*, 1973-1980

The two images above form part of Adam's *Mysteries* project. The artist uses photography almost as a way of writing; these photographs tell a story, a story that could potentially happen in any space within a domestic interior at any time. Everyday objects are shown in the images, which give the effect of making the audience feel as though they see more or less the same thing as if they had been a live witness to these events. But even so, the paradox of photography remains – it brings up the question that if we think we are the witness of this unknown event then to some extent we treat the objects that are shown in the image as evidence. Yet, as Vilém Flusser notes in the quotation from *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* cited above, a multitude of decisions are present within each grain or pixel of a photograph. In the case of Mac Adam's diptych above, we could say that there is a decisive moment in the image on the left, as the uncooked bread hovers above the toaster, held by nail-varnished fingers that could potentially be the hands of the woman in her underwear who is reflected in the toaster and whose figure is also vaguely apparent in the shiny base of the food processor. It is also possible, that all of these reflections are constructed and while we are certainly meant to read these as representing a single figure, the angle of the woman's hand is at odds with the positon of her body, suggesting that there could be more than one figure in the scene. The decisive moment in the image on the right could be said to have captured a woman who is barely dressed, lying on the floor with her arms splayed. A piece of burnt toast is protruding from the toaster. If this image was encountered as a single frame, while it would be clear that something untoward had occurred we would have no sense of the time of the incident. The breakfast may well have been left waiting for minutes, hours or days. In this work, another decisive moment occurs in the meeting of these two images. Together, they presume that whatever has happened to the fallen figure on the floor has occurred not only in between the space of the images (the duration of a piece of toast cooking) but the immediacy

this implies also potentially implicates the photographer in this crime scene. As Diane Dufour notes in her introduction to the catalogue *Images of Convictions: The Construction of Visual Evidence:*

> More than any other, the criminal act stands revealed as opaque, defying descriptions or representation. Into the substance of the image are etched a host of clear indicators along with other, imprecise ones: significant detail is mixed with illusion. Thus the image is always *in itself* an enigma, demanding that we articulate what it really shows. Interpreted by an expert it can be considered as evidence.[40]

The enigma in the work of Mac Adams occurs within the frame of the image, but also in the gap in between two images. As with the potatoes, we see that something has happened, not in the time of the image, but in the time of the non-image. Of course, this presumes that we are indeed looking at a single potato or piece of toast, uncooked and cooked – or living and dead. The cooking – and/or the murder – occurs beyond our vision. It is an assumption made in the imagination, spurred by the meeting of two images. In this process of interpretation, meaning is acquired both through the gaze and through the impulse to complete a story through the clues left behind. Unlike an image that inspires a memory of a previous experience which is like a form of repetition, the particular visions that are inspired *in between* the works of Mac Adams are invisible in the images themselves, instead becoming a catalyst for what this project is positing as new form of vision that is a Happening in the mind of the viewer.

> No one ever questions a camera. – Jan Dibbets[41]

Chinese artist Jiguang Shen's photographic works offer a different view of the relationship between photography, documentary evidence and the imagination. Shen was born in 1945, and graduated from the department of Fine Arts at Beijing's Central Academy of Drama in 1969. Following his studies, he commenced a career as a stage designer and a painter. After the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the study of culture and the creation of art began to rise from the ashes of the destruction of the previous decade. Shen came into contact with photography in 1983, and began to use photography as a form of language to document his life and thoughts in 1984 after he read 'Tao Te Ching'. In the context of both the historic influence

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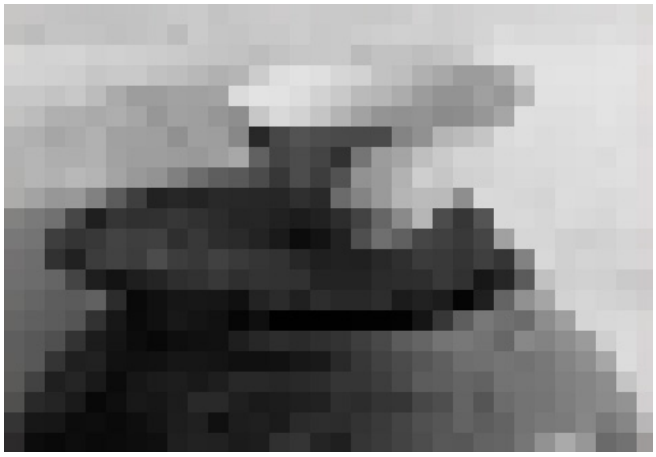
[40] Diane Dufour, *Images of Convictions*: *The Construction of Visual Evidence* (Paris: Le Bal – Editions Xavier Barral, 2015), p.5.

[41] Jan Dibbets, in: *Pandora's Box: Jan Dibbets on Another Photography* [online] Musée d'art Moderne, Paris (2016). http://www.mam.paris.fr/en/expositions/exhibitions-pandoras-box?archive=1 [accessed 6 January, 2019]

from the Cultural Revolution and the philosophical influence from Taoism, Shen approaches his acts of photography as the last record before a subject disappears. From 1984 onwards, Shen's works have established complex archives of images, often published in the form of artists' books.

Shen's photographic book *Three Thousand Stories: Reviving the History of Civilians* (2013) offers a different kind of example to help further my study of the potential for the photographic Happening that may be found in images which function as a form of evidence. Unlike Weegee's actual and doctored crime scenes, and Mac Adams' fictitious and mysterious crime scenes, the work of Jiguang Shen offers another route through which to explore the image as a manifestation of something which has occurred before the time of the image. In Shen's extensive practice of documenting the world, and the particular world of south-west China, the clues that remain in the photographs can perhaps be interpreted, but never fully



19. Jiguang Shen, *Wine tank, cover and old bowl*, 2011

understood. The distant relatives of everyday objects are recognisable subjects in his images – for example, receptacles used to measure rice; however, the manner in which they are presented – often as close-up details, and also the fact that these objects have now disappeared, leave the viewer to imagine their original function.

Like those in the work of Weegee and Mac Adams, the inanimate subjects of Shen's images speak in a certain way. Shen believes that objects can 'talk', and through listening we might uncover something about their histories, and indeed our own.[42] The objects in Shen's work also offer clues to a time beyond the frame of the image – in this instance not between, but

[42] Jiguang Shen, *Three Thousand Stories: Reviving the History of Civilians* (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2013), p. 537.

before. The unrepeatable moment is particularly poignant in Shen's work. Following the destruction of artefacts in the Cultural Revolution, his act of photographing functions as a final reminder of the existence of the subjects of his work – a kind of *memento mori*. His images of a place appear en masse – hundreds of close-ups documenting objects and scenes, as if encountered on an archaeological dig. Each image is accompanied by a short biography of the object pictured, where it was found, and what it was used for in a previous life. Together, the assemblage of crumbling, delicate objects and details offer incomplete evidence of another time, sustained through the image. Within the 420 pictures contained in the book *Three Thousand Stories*, Shen 'touches' history in his own way, feeling the history condensing and appearing on objects. The cracks and crevices apparent on the subjects of his images show signs of frequent use and touch, reminiscent of scars left behind on a body.

I have selected the work of Jiguang Shen as the final example for this chapter, firstly because of his connection to – and extension of – the exploration of images as evidence, but also due to his particular method of working, which is comparable to my own process. Shen is a photographer on a journey, one which seeks to discover forgotten relics from his personal and cultural history, in order not only to make an image but also to make sense of something of his own world. In the following chapter, I describe my journey to the city of Newcastle in the UK: a search for forgotten objects that have a distinct personal connection to my own life history. While Shen photographs objects which are about to disappear, the Newcastle project in Chapter 2 documents an encounter with objects which have partly or entirely disappeared. In both Shen's and my own work, the ritual of the journey is significant. Yet, as I will continue to explore in the subsequent section, my work demonstrates what can occur when objects from the past are not only touched by history, but, through the process of image-making and dissemination, can also potentially touch the future.

The link between photography and Happenings as described above can be made apparent in evidential images – for example, the wrong clues in Weegee, the artifice of Mac Adams and the forgotten places with familiar yet distant objects in the work of Shen. All three examples offer the possibility of a Happening in the mind of the viewer, through the process of photography. It is important to note that I am not arguing that all photography will result in a conceptual Happening, in the same way that I am not suggesting that all experiences from everyday life are Happenings. Rather, that the example of photography-as-evidence can offer a lens through which to understand a reading of images to support my concept of the photographic Happening. As I will continue to explore in the following chapters, this exploration contributes to my investigation of whether an imaginary action can be identified as a Happening, in order to reimagine the space of the Happening through the lens of photography.

CHAPTER TWO:
EVERYTHING ABOUT NEWCASTLE

I am on the way to Newcastle, and I am still confused about the purpose of my journey. I am uncertain about what this might lead to and what kinds of answers I am hoping to find. I just assume the answers will be there.

My interest in the city of Newcastle starts from a knock-on effect of personal histories and journeys. The starting point is that my birthplace, the city of Dandong in China, is also the site of the Battle of the Yellow Sea, one of the most significant and deadly battles in modern Chinese history, that was part of the First Sino-Japanese War (July 1894 - April 1895).

My Story

I have strong memories of the city of Dandong as a young teenager, from the age of twelve to fifteen. After this, I left the city. Before the age of twelve I was too young to remember this place. At the age of four, I was sent to Beijing to become a child actor in a popular Chinese television series that was screened on CCTV (Chinese Central Television Network). CCTV was the only TV channel available at this time for the entire country. I had very short hair and mainly dressed in boys' clothing, partly because I liked it and partly because my mother raised me as a boy. My hair and my ability to memorise language at an early age impressed the local radio station, and this led to me being cast as Baobao, a little boy in the popular television series *My Story* (see Figure 20).

Reflecting on this now, and in the context of this PhD, the narrative of *My Story* seems significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, in terms of the relationship between art, life and me, the connection between my story (my life) and *My Story* (the television series) is somewhat uncanny. One of the main questions driving my research is to understand the intersections between art, life, and identity. An understanding of performativity infuses all of this thinking. What does it mean to perform the identity of an artist? What does it mean to perform the identity of myself? And, in the case of *My Story*, what does it mean to perform the identity of a little boy in front of a camera? In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler writes that '*gender* is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes':

> …gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed… There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results.[43]

In the concluding episode of my first year on the weekly television series, the famous Chinese news anchor Ju Ping was brought onto the set in order to announce to the watching public the news that the character of the little boy Baobao, played by Ruidi Mu, was in actual fact and in real life played by a girl. I was paraded onto the set in a patterned red dress with my hair tied in a strange knot on my head; I curtseyed to the camera and asked China if they liked 'this new side of me'. For the next year of the series, I returned to the screen, no longer as Baobao, but as Ruidi – this time playing myself, as a girl. You might say that I have been questioning performance, gender and identity ever since.

20. Ruidi Mu, *My Story* (Baobao second from left), [stills from CCTV Programme], 1994-95

[43] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, London: Routledge, 2007, p.34.

21. Ruidi Mu, *My Story* (from Baobao to Ruidi), [stills from CCTV Programme], 1994-95

Dandong, Newcastle, and Me

I returned to Dandong in 2015, to visit my family for an extended period before embarking on this PhD in London. My stay coincided with the 120th anniversary of the Battle of the Yellow Sea. It was the first time in my experience of this city as an adult, that I found out in detail about this historical battle and its deadly consequences. There were celebrations all over the country commemorating this event. In the city of Dandong, however, the mainstream media were reporting the particular significance of this event, in order to help encourage more tourism to this place on the border of China. Despite having been born in this town, I knew very little about its history, so I found myself experiencing the place as if I was a tourist. What I was aware of, however, was that this particular link between Dandong and the Battle was not something that had been addressed previously to any great extent. It became clear that what was occurring was the phenomenon of making history in order to create culture.

This history proved to be an important connection in terms of the discovery of two sunken Chinese warships that were destroyed during the battle and had been buried deep in the sea off the coast of Dandong. During my visit, there were numerous television documentaries, events and exhibitions, all marking this discovery and celebrating Dandong's connection to the anniversary events. While a number of warships went down around China during this battle, I discovered through my research that it was only these two particular ships in Dandong that had been built by Armstrong Whitworth at their Elswick Shipyard, in Newcastle in the United Kingdom.

A team of Chinese naval captains, along with Japanese naval officers, were sent to Greenwich in 1877 in order to learn from their English counterparts about how to build and develop their practice. After their training, they returned to China to start their own navy. Almost two decades later, sailors in the Chinese Navy visited Newcastle and obtained two warships. Some of the crew became ill during the journey to the UK and died en route. The captain buried the sailors in Newcastle and he and the remaining Navy returned to fight in the Battle of the Yellow Sea, ironically fighting against the Japanese Navy, many of whom had been their classmates in Greenwich. The two English warships sank during battle, only to be discovered over a century later in my home town of Dandong. Learning this new history in 2015, at a point in my life when I was in China but looking to London, seemed significant. That the only two English warships used in the battle happened to have been buried in the sea below my birthplace mirrored my own particular connection with both Dandong and the

UK. If I hadn’t been born in Dandong, my attention would not have been focused on this discovery – and if I hadn’t visited Dandong in 2015 at the time of the anniversary celebrations, I probably wouldn’t have cared. The synchronicity of all of these events stayed with me as I embarked on my journey to London. And so, I decided to visit Newcastle to find the graves of those Chinese sailors who never made it back home.

Newcastle, 7 May 2016

I left early in the morning for a day trip to Newcastle, the purpose of which was to gather material for a research exhibition at the RCA. Armed with my heavy, large-format Horseman camera and my digital camera, light meter and tripod and a bouquet of cheap flowers, I was heading for St. John's Cemetery in Newcastle to find the graves of the Chinese sailors. Newcastle was filled with yellow flowers that day, and I had Chairman Mao's poem in my head:

> *Go to the countryside*
> *Go to the border*
> *Go to the place that your country needs you the most.*[44]

I don't know why I remembered that poem; perhaps it's because I had been researching Newcastle before departing, and had discovered that it is the last city in England before the Scottish border. Borders have always fascinated me – I suppose this is because Dandong is on the border of China and North Korea.

It was not a good day. For the first three hours after reaching the graveyard I circled the site, but could not find the graves of the Chinese sailors anywhere. According to the texts I had read before my journey, including *Armstrong's River Empire*[45], as well as Chinese CCTV documentaries, the tombstones should have been quite easy to find. The headstones were quite distinct: three in a row, with Chinese writing along their faces. I was looking for this:

I went from the west side of the cemetery to the east side, and went from north to south, row by row by row, until finally I stumbled across this sight:

Three fallen headstones, the faces of which had smashed into the dirt. Perhaps because there were three attached to each other, the heavier stone caused all of them to collapse. What was particularly upsetting to me was not just the site of these fallen headstones in a state of total disrepair,

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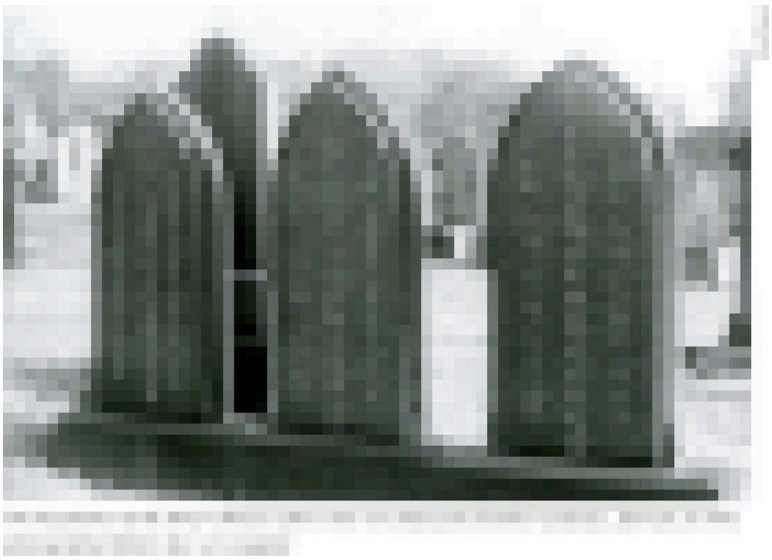
[44] This poem was in one of my primary school text books and everyone in my generation and my parents' generation remembers it. It is a derivative of Mao's writing in the *Down to the Countryside Movement* that was posted in *The People's Paper* on December 22, 1968.

[45] Richard E. Keys and Ken Smith, *Armstrong's River Empire: Tyne Shipyards that Supplied the World* (Newcastle: Tyne Bridge Publishing, 2010)

but also the junk that was piled on top of the stones. Someone had even thrown a discarded Christmas wreath over the rubble. It was not what I had been expecting to see. I pulled out my Horseman camera in order to document the site, only to discover that my light meter was not working, as it had run out of battery. Turning to the digital camera, I was dismayed at the terrible coincidence that it, too, had run out of power. Having had charged them both the day before in preparation for this visit, it felt as if the strange happenstance of them both being drained of power reflected my own sense of misery. I had gone in fully prepared, or so I had thought; the only image-capturing device left for me to use was my mobile phone. I was not in a good mood.



22. Dick Keys, *The headstones of the three Chinese sailors who were buried in St John's Cemetery, Elswick, in 1887, photographed before they were toppled,* 2010

23. Ruidi Mu, *Newcastle*, *7 May 2016*, 2016

Now it was no longer just Mao's poem *Go to the place where your country needs you the most* ringing in my ears, but also Maurice Blanchot's words from *The One Who Was Standing Apart From Me* (1953). This work is written like a novel, in that it has a fictional feeling, but the fiction here is a conversation between the author and his imaginary self. It is set in a fictional room, a room without time. It relates to his much later book, *A Voice From Elsewhere* (2002), written shortly before his death, in which he revisits this trope, this time conducting imaginary conversations with different writers, including Michel Foucault and Paul Celan. However, standing in the Newcastle cemetery it was the earlier text that came to my mind, in which Blanchot describes a certain responsibility, an obligation, and a particular relationship to images:

> Little by little I had this presentiment: that here, in relation to this place, I was burdened with a responsibility I could not turn away from, that obliged me to remain behind, as though to wipe out footsteps or begin over again what had not been done; yes, I had to respond to a role that I did not know, but that I could not disregard, that was more intimate with me than I myself and the burden of which I accepted as I momentarily gave it this name: responsibility toward solitude, deliverance to captive images.[46]

I pulled out my phone, took some pictures of the destroyed graves and, standing there in the middle of the cemetery, emailed the images to *The Paper*[47] with a message noting that I was a Chinese research student in London and that these famous Chinese gravestones were destroyed, encouraging them to pay attention.

Placing the bouquet of flowers on the rubble, and despondent with the knowledge of the destroyed graveyards, I left the cemetery and went in search of the riverfront, in order to locate the site of the former Armstrong Whitworth factory that had built the warships that the dead sailors had come to collect. There was no bus going in my direction, so I picked up my heavy equipment and walked. The walk was a solitary one; it seemed that no other pedestrians were present in the city of Newcastle that day. Heading down the hill from the cemetery, I walked through what could perhaps be called a playground: it had an upturned, mangled shopping trolley and an old badly burned and damaged children's bicycle, in pieces over a pile

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[46] Maurice Blanchot, *The One Who Was Standing Apart From Me*, trans. Lydia Davis (New York: Station Hill Literary Editions, 1993), pp. 28-29.

[47] *The Paper* is China's new mass-circulation newspaper, with distribution across the country.

of ash with a discarded chemical container lying on the grass nearby.

24. Ruidi Mu, *Newcastle*, *7 May 2016*, 2016

25. Ruidi Mu, *Newcastle, 7 May 2016*, 2016

It all seemed very strange. Heading to the main road, I saw another bus stop up ahead, but upon walking up to it, found in the gutter next to it a dead baby fox, looking peaceful but quite dead, with a pink liquid stain on the gravel by its mouth.

I decided to keep walking.

The old Armstrong Whitworth factory had been transformed into a business park, and there was nothing much around it along the appropriately named William Armstrong Drive. Heading to the town centre, I arrived at an intersection, on the corner of which was a brick wall and in front of it a sign saying ‘Road Closed’. It was not evident, because of the placing of the sign in front of a brick wall, exactly which of the roads were closed. When a car came down one of the roads, defying the sign, suddenly I was aware that both of the roads were operational. This felt like a metaphor for my entire expedition. The history has passed and the case was closed: all of these stories I had looked up in preparation for my trip, including the archive films and newspapers, had led me to a site that was, ultimately, closed.

26. Ruidi Mu, *Newcastle, 7 May 2016*, 2016

27. Ruidi Mu, *Road Closed, 7 May 2016*, 2016

I received a response from *The Paper* the following day: a list of questions as to who I was, where I studied, how I came to know about the grave site and whether or not the cemetery had a manager. It seemed that it wasn't just me who felt that this Chinese memorial required more attention. Within the next 48 hours, the story was posted on *The Paper*'s online site, under the headline 'Research Student Studying in the UK Reported 3 Destroyed Chinese Soldier Graveyards Covered Halfway By Dirt, Which Is Very Sad'.

28. *The Paper* [screenshot], 10 May 2016

The article reads:

> On May 7, 2016, Mu Ruidi, a Chinese student from the Royal College of Art, was wandering through the St. John cemetery in Newcastle, UK, searching for the tombstones of five Chinese sailors from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912). After three hours, he found their graves in the eastern part of the cemetery. From north to south lies No.1 tomb of Chen Shoufu, No.2 tomb of Gu Shizhong, No.3 tomb of Yuan Peifu, No.4 tomb of Lian Jinyuan and No.5 tomb of Lian Chengkui.[48]

[48] The Paper, China, 10 May, 2016. http://www.thepaper.cn/baidu.jsp?contid=1467347 [accessed: 27/4/18]

While ‘Ruidi’ is a gender-neutral name, and one that is perhaps not so common, I found it curious that the newspaper should presume that I was male, and did not think to check this fact. It seemed as though all my public appearances in China were subject to television stations and journalists interpreting my gender at their will. I soon received a query from an ex pat friend working at NBC China in London, asking if I had reported this story – which I confirmed, but all went quiet after that. Then, on 21 January, I came across an article in the World News section of the *Daily Telegraph* that made me catch my breath. The headline read: ‘Foreign field will be forever home for Chinese sailors’ and the article stated that:

> Around 130 years after they died, the lives of five Chinese sailors are being remembered as dilapidated graves in an English cemetery holding their remains are restored.

It also noted how the destroyed grave site had been discovered and how this had led a conservation foundation to raise funds to repair the tombstones:

> Last year photos of the cracked tombstones were posted online by a Chinese student at the Royal College of Art in London and attracted the attention of the China Foundation for Cultural Heritage Conservation, a nonprofit organisation. In December the foundation launched its first global crowdfunding campaign with the aim of raising 460,000 yuan (£53,650) to pay for the restoration work, said Li Xiaojie, the foundation’s president. The campaign continues.

Li Xiaojie, president of the China Foundation for Cultural Heritage Conservation, is quoted as saying:

> The five sailors can rest peacefully knowing that even after all these years, people back home still care about them. This is a project full of human warmth and love… We all have a responsibility to preserve our history.[49]

Li’s words echo Blanchot’s sentiment of a burden of responsibility in relation to this place, *a responsibility I could not turn away from*. I was astounded by the impact that my photography project had had on this historical site. My initial idea for going to Newcastle had been to collect materials

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[49] Zhang Zhihao and Wang Mingjie, ‘Foreign field will be forever home for Chinese Sailors’, *Daily Telegraph*, 21 January 2017. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/world/china-watch/culture/chinese-graves-restored-in-newcastle/ [accessed 27/7/18]

with which to create a fictional newspaper, a kind of homage to Yves Klein and his leap into the void. Now the situation had changed, and it was a real newspaper that was reporting the story. The effect of my art practice on real-life events also mirrored my research questions, which were about probing the gap between art and life, and whether or not it existed at all. It all seemed quite blurred, and yet fitting.

I had spent my entire MA questioning the 'liveness' in performance and Happenings. When I started my research project, the focus shifted to the act of photography, and how it can be used to create a certain relationship between artist and viewer. My original thesis title was 'Photography as Environment and Performance as Imagination'. I was questioning the point of the photography becoming 'art' and believed that what made it an artwork was that I myself identified as an artist: therefore the work was an artwork. The image becomes a touch point for the viewer, one which allows them to share a moment of artistic vision with the photographer. This was also the moment when I first considered the conjunction between photography and Happenings. I began thinking about photography and crime scenes, because these scenes are unrepeatable events, like a Happening.[50]

My everyday experience, through this photograph of the destroyed monuments for the Chinese sailors, became an actual Happening in the world, one that was out of my control and that was no longer in the realm of art. Yet it still happened, it was still a Happening.

[50] This idea is explored in the following chapter.

'Impractical Phantoms' at Daybreak: a reflection on practice

The Newcastle project builds on the central questions of my research in terms of the relationship between archives, history and unrepeatable events. The exhibition of the work produced as a result of this research also contributed to my practice of drawing on photographic images, which are then brought into the three-dimensional world.

Impractical Phantoms (2017) was exhibited as part of the RCA Fine Art Research *Daybreak* exhibition, which was held at Safe House in Peckham, London, in 2017. A dilapidated Victorian house, the space provides an unusual and untypical gallery situation for exhibiting artworks. The everyday-ness of the space, combined with its ruined state, offered an interesting environment for my work.

For this installation, I found another 'Road Closed' sign, similar to the one in the image that I took at the intersection in Newcastle. I wanted to reproduce the sense of the impossibility contained within the sign, as in the image, in which 'Road Closed' is leaning up against a brick wall with no clue as to where it is pointing or to what it is referring. I stuck the Newcastle 'Road Closed' image to the back of the actual sign in my installation: the sign and the image could not be viewed at once, but needed to be encountered in the round. The work was installed in front of a window, so that at certain times of the day the 'Road Closed' sign was visible though the reflection in the glass, and it was only at this point that both the photograph and the sign could be seen simultaneously. A bouquet of flowers, similar to those that I had bought to take to Newcastle, leant against the base of the 'Road Closed' sign in the installation. Another bouquet was tied to one of the fence posts outside Safe House, with an image of the Newcastle 'Road Closed' sign, identical to the image in the exhibition, attached to the transparent cellophane wrap.

The image creates a link between the two representations of the sign. The bouquet outside the gallery functions like a hint, or a clue, as to what might be happening inside the gallery, but also to an international gesture of memory and mourning. My experience could not be repeated, and the viewer's experience cannot be the same as mine, but what I am questioning in the installation is the journey through images, the connections that can be made, and the question of an aesthetic community, or communication, that arises through the juxtaposition of images and objects. In traditional analogue photography, there is a distinction between the time of taking the image and the time of making the image. There is a gap, or an

absence, between these two times – and it is this gap that fascinates me. Of particular interest in the *Impractical Phantoms* work is the unrepeatable moment (the time of the image) and the unrepeatable experience (the journey) and making the gap explicit, through this photographic journey – to create another journey, between inside and outside, between the mirroring of images and signs, that both speak and give nothing away.

29. Ruidi Mu, *Impractical Phantoms*, 2017

30. Ruidi Mu, *Impractical Phantoms*, 2017

Maurice Blanchot writes in *The Unavowable Community* (1983):

> The gift or the abandonment is such that, ultimately, there is nothing to give or to give up and that time itself is only one of the ways in which this nothing to give offers and withdraws itself by giving rise to something other than itself, in the shape of an absence. An absence which, in a limited way, applies to the community whose only clearly ungraspable secret it would be. The absence of community is not the failure of community: absence belongs to community as its extreme moment or as the ordeal that exposes it to its necessary disappearance.[51]

The absence could be thought of as the preliminary stage of the creation of a community. On the one hand, there is always an absence implied in the exhibition of images – the absence of the photographer. On the other hand, there is also the absence of the event, of the experience that I have been through: in the case of the Newcastle work, the absences include the details of my journey, in terms of my reasons for being there, and the complicated network of historical and personal connections contained within these photographed moments. Blanchot speaks of the 'shared experience of that which could not be shared, nor kept as one's own',[52] and this gap, this place of always in between-ness, is for me, comparable to the impossibility of the shared experience contained within a photographic image. My experience of visiting Newcastle cannot be shared in the image, but perhaps through this installation, another kind of experience can be shared. It is not, and can never be, a reproduction of the unrepeatable event; but a new kind of event, or happening, or shared experience, takes place in the time and space of the installation.

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[51] Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, trans. Pierre Joris, New York: Station Press, 1988, p. 15.

[52] Ibid.

7 May 2018… Return to Newcastle

Exactly two years after my first visit, I returned to the cemetery in Newcastle (see Figure 31). I took an early train, with exactly the same equipment I had brought with me for my first excursion. Again, I saw the yellow flowers outside the train window – it must just be the season for them to appear. My light meter battery was not working, again, but I found a replacement in a local store. This time, I took the number 1 bus to the cemetery, and alighted the bus along with an elderly woman who showed me a short-cut into the grounds, through a gap in the chicken-wire fence. I was feeling a mixture of excitement and pride, looking forward to seeing the graveyard and the finished repairs to the fallen tombstones that had taken place since, and because of my last visit.

31. Ruidi Mu, *Newcastle, 7 May 2018* [still from video], 2018

Walking up to the site, everything was beautiful. The sun was shining and there were small white flowers in the trees. In my mind, I had an image of the three tombstones, standing upright once again. As I got closer to the graves of the Chinese sailors, my heart sank, as I realised that the three tombstones I had been hoping to find were nowhere to be see. Despite being scheduled to finish in the summer of 2017, as was reported in the press, the repair work was nowhere near close to completion. The fallen

tombstones had been removed. In their absence, the concrete bed which had housed the three stones was now visible. It read:

> *The tombstones on these three and the two neighbouring graves were erected by the officers & crew of the Chinese Cruisers Chih Yuen and Ching Yuen. To provide for these graves & the monument behind being kept in order a sum has been invested in the name of Mr Thos Halliday who will apply the annual interest to that purpose.*

32. Ruidi Mu, *Newcastle, 7 May 2018*, 2018

33. Ruidi Mu, *Newcastle, 7 May 2018*, 2018

This writing, now visible in the absence of the tombstones, reads like a receipt in concrete. It is not about the history or the sailors, but, rather ironically, a note about who pays the bill for the upkeep of the graves. A new frame of concrete had been erected, but it already had a large chip in the front, this new structure was already cracked and damaged. In the centre of the frame, a fresh hole had been dug, which seemed somewhat confusing, and I wondered whose bodies this was meant to house? I also wondered where the three stones had been taken, and who was caring for them now? Inside the hole were dead flowers, empty bottles of Chinese wine, a tiny Chinese flag and some merchandise from a local Chinese restaurant. It was clear that some kind of celebratory event had taken place. All of these clues led me to believe this, yet the celebration was not to commemorate the newly reconstructed grave site.

Angry and disappointed, I hit 'reply' to the last email I had received from *The Paper* in 2016. In the graveyard, just as before, I contacted the journalist to inform them that after two years, the tombstones were still unrepaired. Four days later I received a response: *The Paper* thanked me for getting in contact, but no story was published and they didn't seem particularly interested in pursuing the conversation. Two years on, there were no more centenary celebrations taking place in China, and nobody seemed to care that the work was incomplete.

Even though some things were different, I came away with this strange feeling that nothing had changed. I felt a similar feeling when I returned to Dandong shortly after this visit to Newcastle. With the news that North Korea might be finally opening its borders, the property prices in my city had escalated, yet nothing much had changed in the town itself.

Ten years earlier, before Kim Jong-un's father passed away, there was news that North Korea might then be opening up to world trade. At the time, local people in Dandong, the closest Chinese city to North Korea, were keen to purchase property. It was 2008, I had just turned eighteen, and my mother purchased an abandoned factory, signing the lease in my name. Kim Jong Il passed away in 2011, and the city of North Korea remain closed. Not only this, but nuclear testing recommenced, so rather than attracting new residents, people were moving away from Dandong. The factory remained untouched; there were no potential buyers, as my mother had hoped. It is an assemblage of various buildings, some dating back a hundred years and constructed by Japanese builders, some more recent, from the 1950s. The name of the factory was Rubber Factory Number 2. I don't know where the first factory is, but it was here that rubber soles for shoes were made.

Visiting the factory, my factory, in 2018, I walked around the broken-down buildings and wondered what could possibly be done with these abandoned and crumbling structures. I looked through the broken wooden frame of one of the buildings and saw a green hill in the distance. Turning to my mother, who was with me at the time, I asked about when this hill appeared, because I was certain that I hadn't seen it before. Next to my factory was another factory, one which was used for concrete manufacturing. However, because no one was building anything in the town any more, what had been a large mound of sand had started sprouting green growth, and this was the new hill that appeared to me through the window of the broken factory.

34. Ruidi Mu, *My Factory: Dandong*, 2018

The feeling of being in this factory and discovering this new grassy hill was similar to the encounter with the 'Road Closed' sign in Newcastle. Both suggest a repetition of sorts: the broken windows of the factory were reminiscent of a screen, through which the hill was framed. An absurd sense of potential and failure infuses both. I returned to Dandong and to Newcastle with passion and hope on each occasion, and yet in both cases I felt an intensity of powerlessness in terms of what I can achieve as an artist in the world, and what kind of effect my work can have. When I began this research project, focusing on Happenings and photography, it was with a particular open view about the idea of the identity of the artist. Through

my research, my thinking has changed. Before, my passion was that anyone could be an artist, that the border between everyday life and art was indistinguishable. However, my thinking has shifted somewhat throughout this process, and now this idea of the Happening in relation to photography seems to revolve around thoughts of uncertainty. The uncertainty of a 'Road Closed' sign pointing to nowhere, the uncertainty of a memorial site that may never be finished, the uncertainty of real life and photography. The images become a diary of events, always in the past. A collection of scenes and of clues. I cannot give you my identity as an artist, but perhaps through my work I might be able to share something of an experience which happened, and may still be happening.

CHAPTER THREE: THE DAILY MIRROR

Summer Laundry

In the summer of 2016, I went to meet my mother in the port city of Xiamen on the south-east coast of China for the occasion of the annual China International Fair for Investment and Trade. I wasn't quite sure of my mother's reasons for being there exactly, but I think it had something to do with the piece of land she had bought in Dandong, the site of 'my factory', and her unsuccessful attempts at that point to find a buyer for this place, that was still closed off from North Korean access. We walked around the fair and I was feeling quite confused about my reasons for being there, as an artist, surrounded by rows and rows of what seemed like quite serious trade stalls. I seriously doubted that there would be any potential buyers for our little piece of Dandong here.

I went to buy some coffees and came back to find my mother suddenly pale, sweating and looking terrified. She had just received a call from a mystery person from the Chinese government. Somehow the caller knew that I was there, in Xiamen, with my mother. They demanded that we both return to Dandong immediately in order to assist with an investigation. At this stage we had no clue as to what was going on, and this not-knowing further escalated our fear and confusion. Added to this was my mother's acute awareness of an unfolding political turmoil that was happening at the time in the Liaoning Province, in which Dandong is situated. As reported in the China News Press:

> About 45 NPC [National People's Congress] members from Liaoning, or nearly half of all those representing the province, were expelled on September 13 during an extraordinary session of the national legislature's Standing Committee. In addition, an estimated 523 lawmakers were dismissed or resigned from the 619-member Liaoning People's Congress, a provincial branch of the NPC, after being linked to the election fraud scandal.[53]

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[53] 'Election Result of National People's Congress was Called Void After Fraud Among the Delegates from Lianing Province on 13 September', *Caixin* (English Edition), 20 September, 2016. http://www.cefc.com.hk/china-news/china-newspress-highlights-27-september-2016/ [accessed 19 June, 2018]

This vote-buying election scandal was big news at the time. The mass dismissals were making headlines around the world.[54] At the time my aunt was Vice-Mayor of Dandong. While we had no immediate connection with the political unrest, my mother was aware of the blackmail tactics operating in the city at the time, and I knew that her panic-stricken response to this phone call was because she was worried about her sister. One wouldn't want to be caught up in such things. We returned to Dandong, and the following day were called to a meeting in an office in town. My mother was taken into one room and I remained outside. During this time, I was asked questions about my profession and my life. It was a fairly relaxed conversation. Eventually, the line of questioning became a little more pointed and I was asked if my family had a close relationship with Ma Xiaohong, a well-known businesswoman and government representative from Liaoning Province. It soon became clear that our reason for being there had nothing to do with my aunt.

Up to this point in 2016, Ma Xiaohong had been the most successful businesswoman to emerge from our city:

> By age 44, she had built a commercial empire accounting for a fifth of trade between the Communist neighbours. She was appointed to the provincial People's Congress, granted special privileges to export petroleum products to the North and feted by officials as a "woman of distinction."[55]

Her trade, ranging from DVD players to washing machines and basic electrical goods, was mainly conducted across the Friendship Bridge that linked Dandong to North Korea. She was also well known for the Korean restaurant that she ran in Dandong, just beside the bridge. All the waitresses in this restaurant were from North Korea, and their presence was a feature there, as they dressed in traditional costume and often performed traditional dance during the evenings. Ma Xiaohong was a friend of my mother's: they occasionally would meet up and play mah-jong, and her restaurant was a favourite place that my mother would take visiting guests to, so that they could experience the Korean influence in Dandong and perhaps imagine a future in which the two cities might come together more freely (therefore making our piece of land attractive to potential buyers).

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[54] Michael Forsythe, 'An Unlikely Crime in One-Party China: Election Fraud', *The New York Times*, 14 September, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/15/world/asia/china-npc-election-fraud-liaoning.html [accessed 19 June, 2018]

[55] Steven Lee Myers, 'Businesswoman's Fate a Test of China's Resolve on North Korea', *The New York Times*, 10 January 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/10/world/asia/north-korea-china-trade-ma-xiaohong.html [accessed 19 June, 2018]

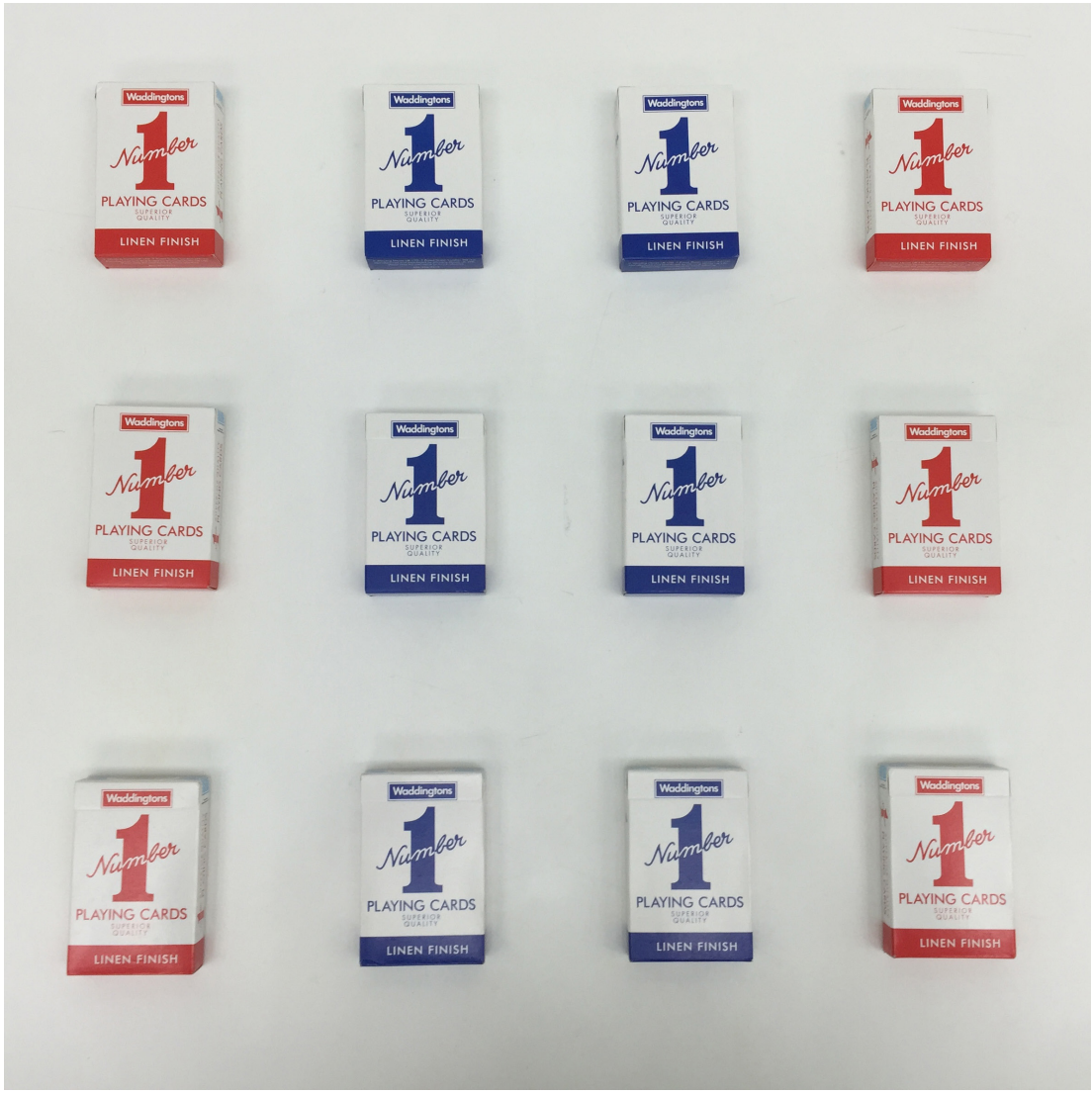
In 2016, Ms. Ma (or Aunty Ma, as I knew her), was accused by American prosecutors of assisting North Korea by using her companies to help the North Koreans evade international sanctions. These accusations were investigated by the Chinese government, despite no evidence being found or presented in support of the allegations. At the time of our 'interview' no one had seen or heard from Xiaohong for months. We did not know if she had been arrested, she had simply just disappeared. My mother, it turned out, was one of the last people to have been with Xiaohong before she went missing.

In 2013, I had attended a lunch with my mother, Ma Xiaohong, her daughter and a small group of work friends. It was a fairly uneventful affair, but now, three years later, it seemed to be of interest to the government officials in this office in Dandong where my mother and I were being questioned. It was startling to me that these people would be aware that I had attended this lunch so many years ago – an event I only vaguely remembered myself. I did recall it, however, as it had been the first time I had met my mother's friend in person. Her daughter and I shared WeChat accounts, and I had noticed how 'normal' her account had looked lately, despite whatever was happening to her mother. Images of her shopping at luxury boutiques, playing League of Legends and enjoying a lovely summer in Canada filled her social media account. There were no clues about what was really going on to be found here. My mother and I were unable to assist with the investigation, apart from recounting stories of various card games and business trips; yet, as with my trip to Newcastle, it seemed that once again my life was becoming intertwined with the news.

Returning to London, I took part in a research exhibition held at the RCA's Dyson Gallery that brought together PhD students who participated in the 2015/16 Research Methods Course 'Performance' cluster, convened by Dr Chantal Faust and led by Jeremy Millar. The exhibition focused on the notion of identity in relation to performativity, and I was interested in reflecting my recent experience in the summer in my contribution to the show.

Titled *Summer Laundry*, the work presented an arrangement of 12 decks of playing cards, arranged in a grid formation on top of a table borrowed from the RCA café. I was thinking about my mother and Aunty Ma's games of mah-jong, and how card games are often associated with gambling and the illegal transaction of money, in a laundering sense. This related to the election scandal in Liaoning on a larger scale and, coincidentally, the number of cards contained within the decks on display equalled 648, which was close to the number of Chinese lawmakers who had been recently dismissed from office, as reported by the press. Also, there is the Chinese term 'cleaning cards', *xi pai* [洗牌], which translates literally as washing

cards, and refers to shuffling and dealing a new deck. Lastly, I was thinking about what it might mean to perform *identity*, and in particular, was considering presumptions of identity and the way that laundry has been used as a stereotype to describe Chinese foreign workers. All of these various personal histories were contained for me in these packs of cards, lined up in a row. However, like the unopened boxes, the arrangement did not reveal what it contained. Most people assumed I had spent the summer playing cards.



35. Ruidi Mu, *Summer Laundry*, 2016

The Friendship within the Golden Era

While the Newcastle project offered an example of my life having an influence on the news – a series of small coincidences, or effects, that resulted in real actions in the everyday – the *Summer Laundry* installation represented a personal experience of understanding the news and a suddenly intimate relationship with contemporary political unrest. Both examples demonstrate different kinds of mirroring, in terms of how international news is related within the UK, but also the mirroring of my own everyday life within these larger stories. I often think about this as if it were a series of refractions. The news hits me, like a mirror reflection, and I reflect it back outwards in my artwork, but it is never guaranteed that I am understanding the first reflection accurately, or that the viewers of my work will receive an accurate reflection of its contents. As Sara Ahmed writes in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*:

> Emotions in their very intensity involve miscommunication, such that even when we feel we have the same feeling, we don't necessarily have the same relationship to the feeling. Given that shared feelings are not about feeling the same feeling, or feeling-in-common, I suggest that it is the objects of emotion that circulate, rather than emotion as such.[56]

The next example began with what was not perhaps a miscommunication, but rather a communication that was overheard, by accident. It was mid-2016 and, because I was very interested in the everyday in my work, I was reading a lot of newspapers and listening to LBC talk radio because, apparently, it was 'leading Britain's conversation'. On the 11th of May, a particular story caught my attention. The Queen was filmed in a short private conversation with a senior Metropolitan Police officer, and it was fairly clear from the recording that she was not aware of the television cameras surrounding her. In the brief clip that was broadcast widely and made front-page news, the Queen is introduced to Commander Lucy D'Orsi, who was the gold commander during Chinese President Xi Jinping's first state visit to Britain in 2015. The Queen's response to the commander, upon hearing that the officer was in charge during the visit, was 'Oh, bad luck'. She is later heard saying that the Chinese officials 'were very rude

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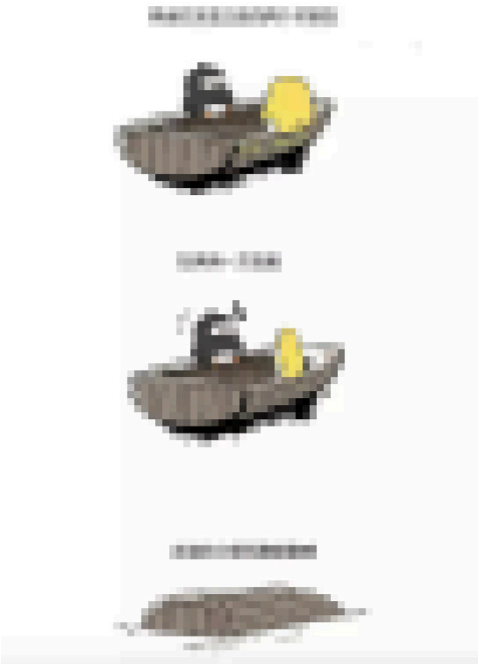
[56] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp.10-11.

to the ambassador'[57]. It was particularly bad timing, because China and the UK had apparently entered a 'golden era' of international relations, with strong commitment to working towards advancements in technology, communication and sport. President Jinping's visit had been deemed a success in the Chinese media and an opportunity to show the strength and vigour of China today. It had been a good news story, one which gave a lot of confidence to the Chinese people, offering a good impression of life in Britain, and importantly the friendship between the two nations. Images of President Jinping and Prime Minister David Cameron had made headlines around the world as they sat together in an English pub, drinking beer and feasting on fish and chips. It really looked like they were having a good time together.

Friendship, when translated into Chinese language, is separated into the words 'friend' and 'ship', and following the Queen's faux pas there were jokes in China at the time about this ship of friends, and how easy it was to capsize the boat.



36. *Found online image*: The Boat of Friendship, 2018

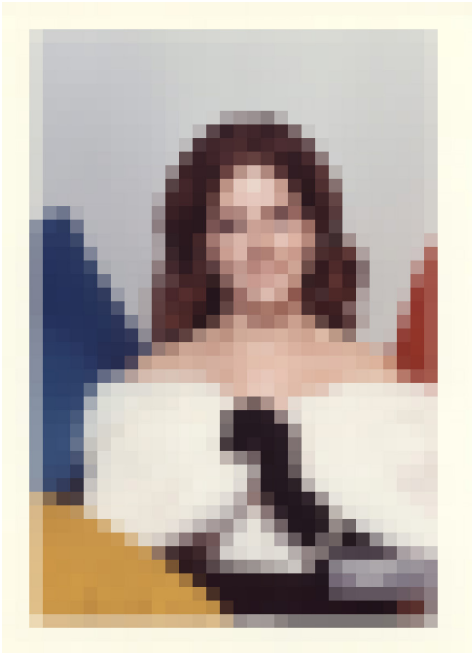
The front page of every major London newspaper featured this story on 11 May 2016, with headlines like: *'Oh, bad luck': Queen lashes rude Chinese officials'; 'Oh, bad luck': Queen's unguarded comments on Chinese state visit'* and *'Queen Elizabeth Says Chinese Officials Were 'Very Rude'*. I collected as many of these newspapers as I could find, and folded the front pages into various origami shapes. These small sculptures were fragile, referring to the delicate balance of the 'Golden Era' friendship, and they

were presented on the floor, which accentuated their vulnerability. One of the paper boats, like the joke about the ship of friends, was upside down. These were transient boats, boats which would disintegrate if they touched water, and which were in danger of being stood upon, or blown away.

37. Ruidi Mu, *The Friendship within the Golden Era*, 2016

The Golden Experience

In the winter of 2016, 100 migrant boats were destroyed in Sicily. The boats' occupants had been asylum seekers from North Africa, many of whom had been sent back home, and some of whom had been processed through Italian asylum centres. These boats were the subject of *The Bureaucracy of Angels*, a film by Broomberg & Chanarin that was commissioned by Art on the Underground and displayed at King's Cross St. Pancras station on a screen positioned close to the exit of the Eurostar terminal. I first came across the work at a public lecture that was hosted by the RCA in November 2017: 'What Should White Culture Do? Art, Politics, Race'.[58] The title intrigued me, I was curious about what 'white culture' was and how it might be represented – and as an artist, and a foreigner, and a researcher interested in politics, I wondered how the many speakers were going to approach this subject. Over the course of the day, it became clear that the focus of the symposium was going to be the refugee crisis in Europe, the Black Lives Matter movement in the US and the position of BAME people within the UK. There was no mention of anything to do with East Asia, and it seemed that 'what white culture should do' did not extend that far around the globe. It was a particular definition of whiteness, one which seemed a bit blind to its own partiality.



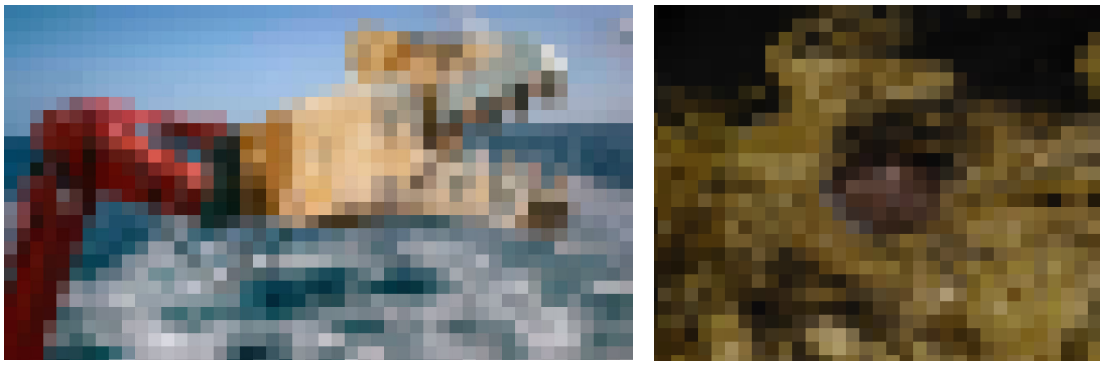
38. Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin, *Shirley,* 2012

[58] 'What Should White Culture Do? Art, Politics, Race': a public symposium organised by Art on the Underground and the Royal College of Art, Royal College of Art, London, 11 November 2017.

The artist duo Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin took to the stage and discussed their earlier work, which looked at the racist history of Kodak film, in that the film was designed to capture the skin tones of white bodies, rendering those with darker skin almost impossible to see, as they were barely visible.[59] This was amplified by the use of what was known as Kodak's 'Shirley cards', used for colour balancing, which show an image of a 'perfect white woman' in a colourful dress or against a colourful background, which were used as the standard for colour film portraiture, as the ideal measurement for calibrating skin tone.

> The light skin tones of these women – named 'Shirley' by male industry users after the name of the first color test-strip-card model – have been recognized skin ideal standard for most North American analogue photo labs since the early part of the twentieth century and they continue to function as the dominant norm.[60]

Broomberg & Chanarin noted that the recognition of this history of bias in film photography was not due to a sudden shift in understanding the needs of non-white customers, but rather because of complaints received from factories who were attempting to photograph their products for consumers, but were unable to capture the tones of items such as dark wooden furniture, or chocolate. The artists then proceeded to screen *The Bureaucracy of Angels*, which seemed like quite a bizarre response to the quandaries they were raising in their talk.



39. Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin, *The Bureaucracy of Angels* [stills], 2017

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[59] Rosa Wevers, '"Kodak Shirley is the Norm" On Racism and Photography', *Junctions Graduate Journal of the Humanities*, 1: 1 (2016). http://junctionsjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Kodak-Shirley-is-the-norm_Wevers.pdf [accessed 3 July 2018]

[60] Lorna Roth, 'Looking at Shirley, the Ultimate Norm: Colour Balance, Image Technologies and Cognitive Equity.' *Canadian Journal of Communication 34*, (2009), 112.

The film begins with an animated singing digger, its hydraulic jaws resembling the head of a dinosaur or dragon. The machine croons a Sicilian ballad as it goes about devouring the abandoned boats on the seaside. However, it was a different section of the film which I found particularly disturbing. The film fades to night-time, and boatful of refugees in life jackets then cuts to a shot of them all huddled together on an emergency boat, covered in gold foil emergency blankets. These specially designed protective blankets are gold on one side for when it is cold and heat needs to be absorbed, and silver on the reverse in order to reflect the heat in extreme high temperatures. Strangely, the digger appears throughout, an oddly comical character in a devastating scene. Thinking again about reflection, and refraction, Broomberg & Chanarin's work offered their particular mirroring of the news of the day within an artwork. I felt that I also needed to make a response: my own refraction of their reflection.

40. Ruidi Mu, *The Golden Experience*, 2018

The Golden Experience was a site-specific installation, displayed as part of the 'Documents' group exhibition at Lumen Studios in Bethnal Green in January 2018. At the entrance to the gallery, in a niche in a brick wall, I attached one of the gold emergency blankets seen in Broomberg & Chanarin's film. The gold foil material was folded into a small square – which is how they are packaged – and it appeared as an innocuous gold square against a grey wall. In another corner of the gallery, in a space between two arches, I placed a tray of Ferrero Rocher chocolates, having first picked off all the label stickers from each chocolate. Huddled together, alone on the edge of floor and wall, these gold-wrapped chocolates hinted at the gold-wrapped bodies of the refugees in *The Bureaucracy of Angels*. Like the emergency blanket, the chocolate foil was golden on the outside and silver on the inside. Visitors to the gallery were invited to take a chocolate away with them – in a sense, consuming the artwork and perhaps consuming the bodies, in a way that Broomberg & Chanarin seem to be doing in their film. In their advertising campaign, the Italian chocolate company describe 'the beauty of gold' and how 'Ferrero Rocher bring us closer to our loved ones and to the people we care about'.[61]

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[61] Ferrero Rocher, *'The Golden Experience'*, https://www.ferrerorocher.com/en/uk/the-golden-experience [accessed 3 July 2018]

Daily Mirror

The first daily newspaper to appear in Britain was The Daily Courant, which was first published in 1702. For the first time, British people could come together in reading the same material, 'the news', and share something in common through this experience. Through these printed narratives, stories of daily life, of criminal activity, local and global events, could be relived through the reader's imagination. The newspaper is like an early precursor to the Happenings of the 1960s, both offering the opportunity for their reader/audience/participant/percipient to gain knowledge of what is often an unrepeatable action from everyday life. Both in a sense provide a form of reflection of ourselves, to ourselves; however, the accuracy of such mirror-images is of course dependent on perspective.

It seems to make sense that a national tabloid newspaper might be titled the *Daily Mirror*. Interestingly, when the paper was first launched in 1903, it was designed as 'a newspaper for women, by women'.[62] This seems like an unusual beginning for a newspaper that is now renowned for its right-wing politics, misogyny and cruel caricatures. Mary Howarth was the first editor of the *Daily Mirror* and the first woman to be an editor of a major newspaper on Fleet Street. However, her role was short-lived, and by 1904 a new male editor, Hamilton Fyfe, was appointed, and he proceeded to fire all the women on the staff, noting that 'women can't write and don't want to read'.[63] In the late 1930s, under the editorship of Guy Bartholomew, the newspaper went from being a conservative-leaning publication to a left-wing newspaper that was designed to appeal to the working class. This shift had an effect in transforming the appearance of the publication, with bigger headlines, more images and a reduction in length of the accompanying text.

What kind of mirror does the *Daily Mirror* now provide? Whose 'everyday' does the news reflect, and whose does it not? Walter Benjamin famously wrote that 'there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism'.[64] Picking up a copy of the *Daily Mirror* in 2018, the slogan below the masthead reads: *FIGHTING FOR YOU*. But who is this You? Is it me, is it you? Flipping through its pages, it is certainly

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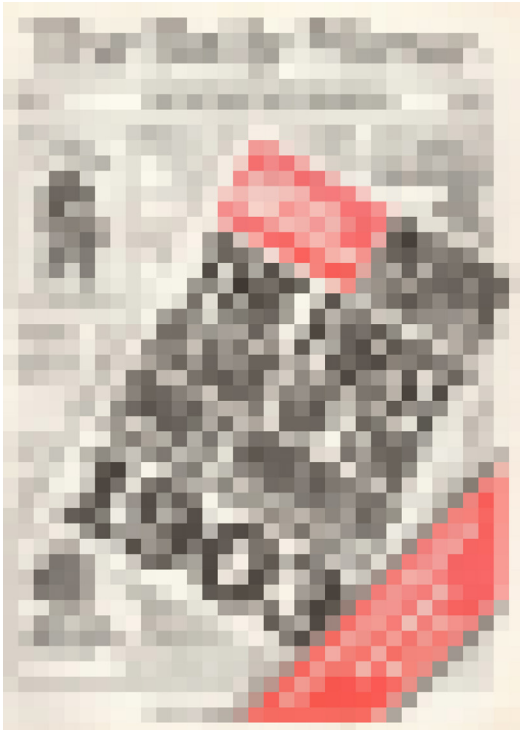
[62] https://www.ukpressonline.co.uk/ukpressonline/explore/MGN/DMir/month/1984-05;jsessionid=3F3A4B586B0C974B0D97DCDACF5F3346 [accessed 27 July 2018]

[63] Kevin Williams, *Read All About It!: a History of the British Newspaper* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 132.

[64] Walter Benjamin, cited in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, ed. Michael P. Steinberg (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), p.209.

very British, and a certain kind of Britain at that.

Most daily editions will feature the royal family, the NHS, something about London buses and transport, and television celebrities up to no good. The writing style is fairly simple, almost like a children's story, and, just like a children's picture book, images dominate the reading experience. However, the



41. Found online image: *The First Issue of The Daily Mirror: Monday, November 2, 1903, Reprinted in 1973*, 2018

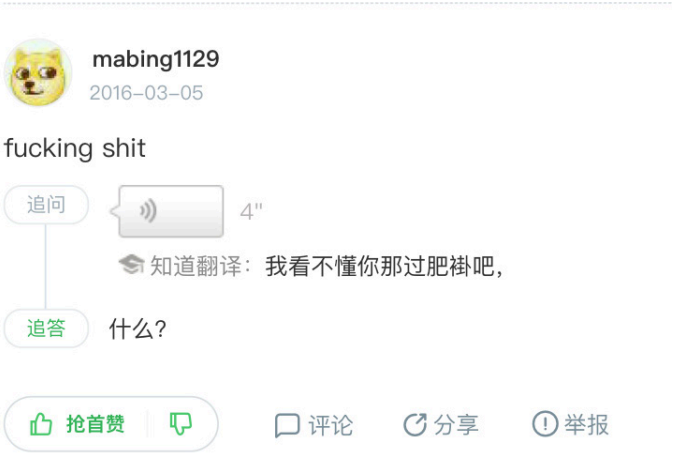
42. Found online image: *The Daily Mirror: Tuesday April 17 2018*, 2018

stories contained within the *Daily Mirror* purport to be non-fiction, though at times the embellishment within the journalism makes one wonder.

It was 22 May 2017; I recall the date well because it is my mother's birthday, and I was walking from Pimlico towards Victoria train station to purchase a birthday card to send to China – a little too late. As I wandered through the shops on the high street, I came across Mr Cad – a specialist analogue photography shop, which I never knew existed. Mr Cad was brimming with vintage cameras, piled to the roof. The staff were all photographic specialists, and it was a bit of a find, as these stores are becoming rarer and rarer. While the shop windows displayed all the fancy vintage cameras, outside on the street were containers of mouldy leather camera cases, broken lenses and miscellaneous photo equipment. Everything was black and brown, except for a box containing little red things that caught my eye. I walked over to peer inside, and found approximately 20 individually packaged disposable cameras, each housed in a red cardboard sheath, with the *Daily Mirror* logo emblazoned on the front and also printed on the red background. I went inside to speak to the shop manager and asked her how many of these disposable cameras she had in stock. She replied, 'How many do you want?'. My thinking was that if she had enough cameras for me to make a year-long project, during which time I could use one camera a day to shoot a roll of film, this could be an interesting opportunity. A 'daily mirror' of my everyday life, using these *Daily Mirror* cameras as a capturing device. I ended up purchasing 386 of the *Daily Mirror* disposables, one for each day of the year, and a couple of spares. It was a bit of a risk, as the quality of the individual cameras were a bit hit and miss – and the film expiry date was some time in 2007, so they were over 10 years old.

My initial thought was to begin the project at the start of the new academic year, but I didn't want this to be a purely academic exercise. Then I thought I would begin it on my birthday, but why would my 28th birthday mean anything to anyone else? I was still thinking about the relationship between photography and everyday life, and it came to me that the Chinese New Year was coming up, and it was to be the Year of the Dog. I decided to begin my 'Daily Mirror' project on the 15th of February 2018, which was first day of the Chinese New Year, so that at the end of the 354 days of this calendar I would have a collection of my life, and I would title it *Dog Days*. While in English 'dog days' refers to the sultry days of summer, the Chinese translation of this phrase is an expletive, often voiced in moments of exasperation, which describes an uncomfortable, annoying, or frustrating experience. As discussed above, my research at the time was also focusing on the relationship between the mirror and the task of translation – both offering perceptions which involve refractions of reflections.

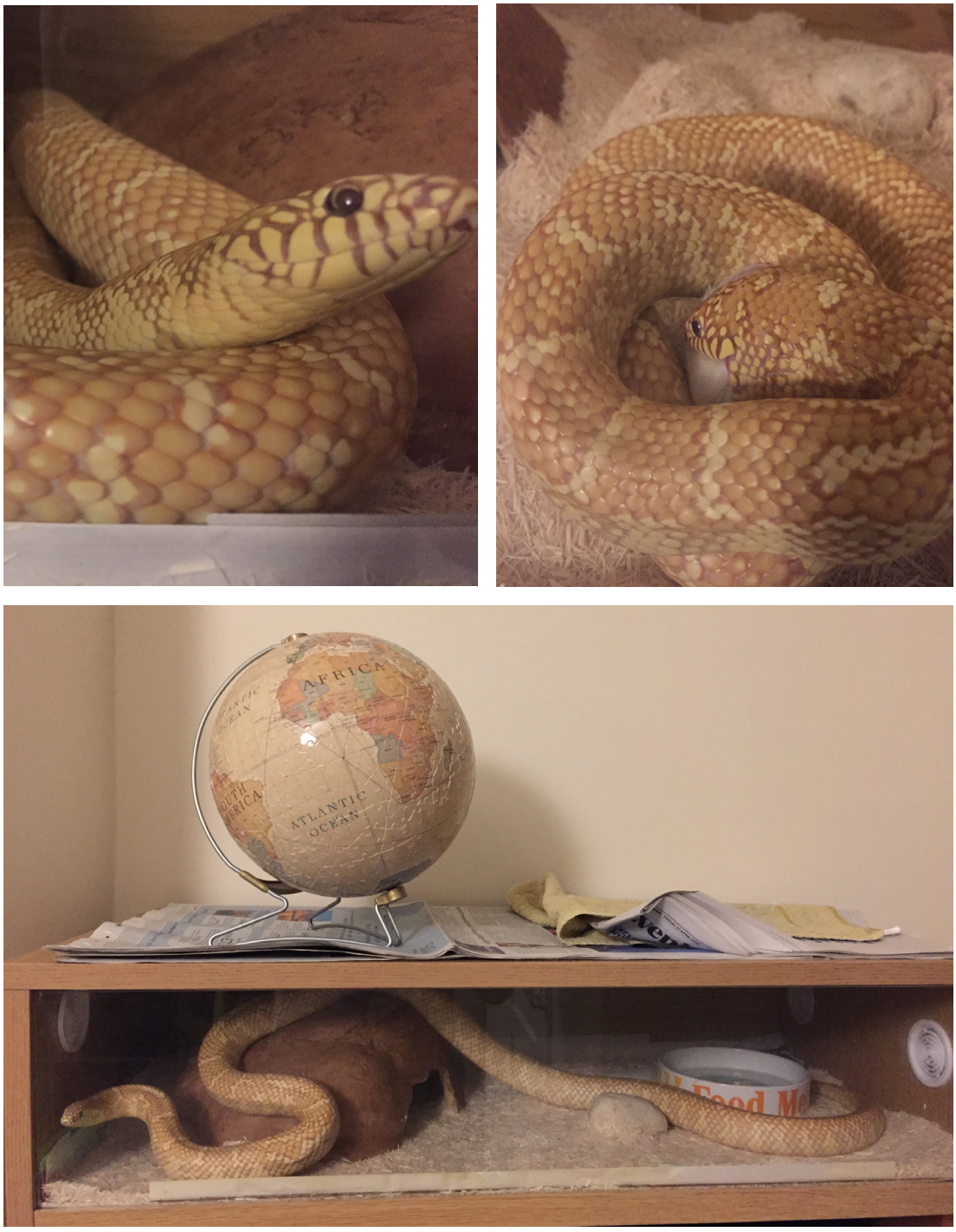
43. Ruidi Mu, *Daily Mirror: The Cameras*, 2018-19



44. Found online image, *One example of the Chinese translation of Dog Days*, 2018

At the time of writing, I am now six months into this project. I take one *Daily Mirror* camera out with me every single day. Sometimes they don't work, but on most occasions I use the 27 frames of film to capture moments from my everyday life. As the project continues, I realise that my relationship to time and my dependence on the routine of the act of imaging is changing. There are days when night falls, and when I realise that I still have over 20 shots to take, but I haven't left my room all day. I begin to take photo-

graphs of my washing machine, my Ikea lamp, my pet snake. Even this is becoming repetitive, and by the end of the series I will have accumulated numerous photographs of my intimate daily life, my appliances, my snake. This ritual also highlights the circularity of my everyday experiences, a short circuit between home, the library, college, and around 7pm a trip to Waitrose to purchase the reduced chicken and bakery items. And so it continues.



45. Ruidi Mu, *My Pet Snake: Indicative Daily Mirror Images*, 2018

I was reading Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation (1818/19)*.[65] It was making me depressed. However, I was curious that he wrote this text in his late twenties, at a similar age to my own, and he was one of the first Western philosophers to introduce influences from Eastern traditions into his writing, considering Buddhist ideas of suffering and enlightenment in his scholarship. Schopenhauer describes life as a kind of pendulum, one which swings from one unfulfilled desire to another. This incessant trajectory also reminded me of the plight of Sisyphus, pushing his stone up the mountain, only to have it roll back down again. My *Daily Mirror* images were beginning to accumulate, and the excitement that I had felt at the beginning of the project about all the potential things I could photograph in the year was beginning to dwindle in the light of the true banality of my everyday existence.

It is probably worth mentioning that the images of my toothless snake above were taken with my phone camera. The *Daily Mirror* images are yet to be developed, as I made the decision at the beginning of this project that if I choose expose the film, I will not do so during the Year of the Dog. At the beginning of each day, I open a fresh camera from its packaging, and write the day's date on the outer red cardboard cover. At the end of the day, the camera is placed in a sealed plastic bag, which is also labelled with the date. As I write this now, halfway through the project, I have almost equal stacks of exposed cameras and ones waiting to be opened. Having made this decision not to expose the film, there is of course the real possibility that the cameras are all faulty, that none of the images will ever come to light. In the midst of this process, it is the act of photographing, rather than the photograph itself, that is important. The used cameras retain their mystery, little Pandora's boxes waiting for the Year of the Pig. Photography is linked with potential in this way, especially in the case of analogue imaging – its fragility leads to inevitable chance occurrences. If at the conclusion of this project I choose not to develop the film at all, the images contained within the *Daily Mirror* cameras can only be accessed by a process of imagination. Photography here becomes a form of Happening, wherein the viewer must try and imagine what happened during my 354 Dog Days. It's a little like Manzoni's cans of shit.

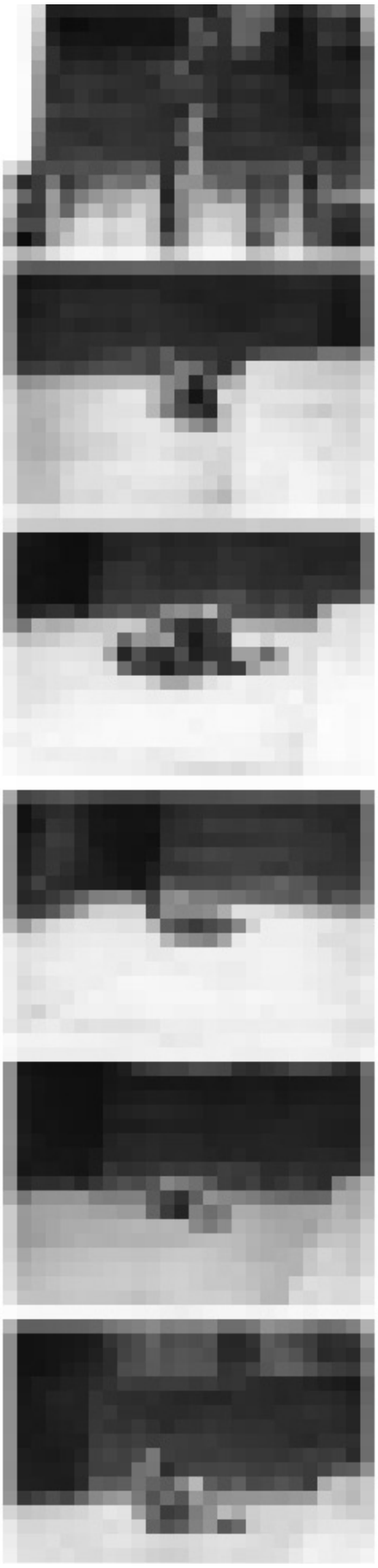
Another artist who considers Happenings in relation to photography is Tehching Hsieh. In his early work, Hsieh was influenced by Yves Klein. *Jump Piece* was a performance made for camera, captured on film and in still images in Taipei in 1973. Unlike Klein's famous work *Leap into the Void*, a

[65] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (1818/19) (London: Kegan Paul, Trench Trübner and Co., 1904)

photomontage that depicts a man jumping from a first-floor window, hovering in the air, Hsieh's documents were not montaged in any way. Klein's falling figure came to a soft landing not depicted in the image, which has been doctored in such a way as to suggest he will eventually fall to the ground. In Hsieh's fall, he jumps out the window and proceeds to fall directly onto the concrete floor below, succeeding in breaking both his ankles in the process.

46. Piero Manzoni, *Artist's Shit*, 1961

47. Yves Klein, *Leap into the Void*, 1960



48. Tehching Hsieh, *Jump Piece*, 1973

Following this painful event, the artist destroyed the film; however, the serial photograph which captures the fall remains. As with Happenings, these images reveal a record of an unrepeatable act. More recently, in 2017, Hsieh represented Taiwan at the Venice Biennale. His exhibition, titled 'Doing Time', presented two of the artist's *One Year Performances*. Both works reflect on Hsieh's personal narrative, as an illegal immigrant who escaped Taiwan for America in the 1970s. In *One Year Performance 1980-1981 (Time Clock Piece)* he subjected himself to a gruelling routine of living in his studio and punching a card into a worker's time clock every hour, on the hour, for the duration of a year. Each time Hsieh punched the card, he would shoot a single photograph on 16mm film, and in this way the punched cards and the images become the diary and archive of this year-long performance. Following this work, in *One Year Performance 1981-1982 (Outdoor Piece)* the artist placed the following constraints on himself and his life for twelve months:

> I, Tehching Hsieh, plan to do a one-year performance piece.
>
> I shall stay OUTDOORS for one year, never go inside.
>
> I shall not go in to a building, subway, train, car, airplane, ship, cave, tent.
>
> I shall have a sleeping bag.
>
> The performance shall begin on September 26, 1981 at 2pm and continue until September 26, 1982 at 2pm.
>
> Tehching Hsieh[66]

Again, the work was documented in photographs. The resulting series of images visualise Hsieh's year outdoors, walking through the snow, eating on the streets. The title of the exhibition, 'Doing Time', suggests a term of imprisonment, and in this endurance piece the world becomes the artist's prison cell. It is interesting to note this particular reliance on photography, this urgency to document, and it makes me wonder about the essence of the project. Is it about the endurance, the everyday suffering, or is it about the images that become evidence of the fact? It is at this point that Hsieh's practice differs from my own. For Hsieh, unrepeatable acts turn into a meditation on life as performance. In my work, I am more interested in the merging of life and art as a form of Happening, one which may never actually be seen.

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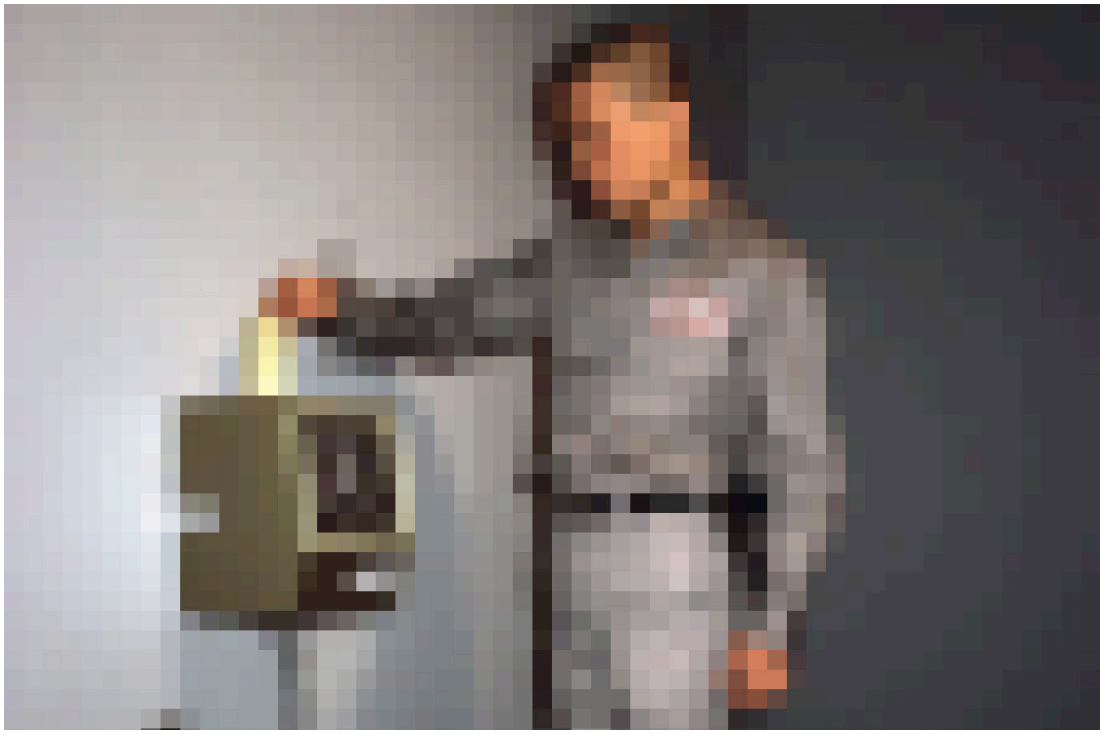
[66] Tehching Hsieh, 'Doing Time', Taiwan in Venice (2017), http://www.taiwaninvenice.org/ [accessed 1 August 2018]



49. Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance 1980-1981 (Time Clock Piece)*, 1980-1981

50. Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance 1981-1982 (Outdoor Piece)*, 1981-82

51. Allan Kaprow, *Fluids* [California], 1967

52. Allan Kaprow, *Fluids* [Nationalgalerie, Berlin], 2015

All of this of course draws on Allan Kaprow's Happenings and performance events from the late 1950s and '60s. The legacy of these works, and how their meaning has perhaps been seized by the art market, is worth noting. Following Kaprow's death in 2006, some of his apparently unrepeatable works were recreated and repeated posthumously. For example, his work *Fluids*, which was made in 1967 and displayed in public locations across California, featured a structure made of ice bricks that gradually melt and disappear. Almost half a century later, and nine years after the artist's death, in 2015, Kaprow's *Fluids*

reappeared in Berlin, courtesy of the Allan Kaprow Estate and his representing gallery, Hauser & Wirth.[67] Fifty years later the ice still melts, as it did in 1967; however, the backdrop of the work – the world – is remarkably different in terms of ideology, politics, society and economy. It therefore begs the question: why is the Happening happening again? And is it still a Happening, if so?

53. Front cover of the *Daily Mirror*, Monday 21 July, 1969

[67] FLUIDS: A Happening by Allan Kaprow 1967-2015, Nationalgalerie, Staatlichmuseen zu Berlin, 2015, http://www.kaprowinberlin.smb.museum/en/ [accessed 3 August 2018]

Like the news, Happenings cannot be repeated. In the case of Kaprow's resurrected *Fluids*, history is reconstructed, from the 1960s and into the present. Imagine if a news headline from the 1960s was repeated again, decades after its first reporting. What would happen if the front page from the *Daily Mirror* of Monday 21 July 1969 was repeated in 2018? Could Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong land on the moon, again? Such acts cannot be repeated; they only happen once, for the first time. In fact, the cover image of the *Daily Mirror* on 21 July 1969 shows a simulated image, a staging of the astronauts for the camera and for the world to see. Kaprow's 2015 *Fluids* may look similar to their siblings from 1967; however, it is only a superficial connection. Like the moment of photography, a Happening can never be repeated. The restaging of Kaprow's work might use the same title as its predecessor; however, it is an entirely different work, one which in my opinion, is rather diluted. Life is full of coincidences, and the landscape is continuously shifting. With the introduction of photography, life becomes staged for the camera. We always consider photography in relation to the physical or digital image, but the Happening, that unrepeatable moment, happens at the time of the image and not on its surface. As with Aldrin's and Armstrong's first steps on the moon, sometimes the Happening occurs and it is only for those present to see.

CONCLUSION:
BIT OF A BUGGER

I experienced sleepwalking for the first time in my life in 2018. It happened that I woke up to a sound and it was that of my front door closing. I was on the wrong side – outside – and had no memory of how I had ended up there. It was cold and very early in the morning, too early to wake my neighbour. I somehow managed to crawl into the toddler's pram that was outside her front door and stayed huddled in there until the lights came on next door and it was acceptable to knock on the front door. She let me inside and into her garden, from where I managed to get back into my kitchen through the window.

That shock of waking up somewhere different from where I expected to be is not entirely dissimilar to the feeling of nearing the completion of this PhD. From one perspective, the 'strange phantoms' in my title refer to the role of photography and the image-as-evidence in my research practice and the 'fictitious dreamlands', and to what can occur in the gap between objects and images, audience and interpretation. From another perspective, the 'strange phantoms and fictitious dreamlands' also describe my own research trajectory over the past four years, a period during which time has felt stretched in a particular way, as I have focused in on these questions of photography, Happenings and me.

What is the effect of a period of deep research on the practice of an artist? And how much can an artist's practice affect the world? What kind of event, or Happening, is the practice-led PhD? Thinking back to Newcastle, despite my efforts to restore the graves of the Chinese sailors and the associated news reportage and public response that I received in response to my work, it seemed that it was all for nothing. After I had initially discovered them buried in piles of rubbish during my first visit in 2016, two years later they had all but disappeared from the site, with their newly built concrete foundations already broken.

For *Flight Mode*, the 2018 School of Arts & Humanities Research Exhibition at Assembly Point in Peckham, I exhibited a photograph of a detail of the broken graveyard at Newcastle laid with the bunch of tulips I had brought to commemorate the site. Close up, it was all concrete and flowers, so you couldn't identify the place, the surroundings or indeed where in the world this image was taken. The image was mounted in a domestic-sized frame and displayed on the sill of a window at the entrance to the gallery. Mirroring this work, at the opposite window was another image of the same size, this one offering a glimpse of the green hill that was visible through the broken wooden frame of the building in my factory, discussed in Chapter Two.

54. Ruidi Mu, *Newcastle: Flight Mode, Peckham*, 2018

55. Ruidi Mu, *Factory: Flight Mode, Peckham*, 2018

As with *Impractical Phantoms* (2017), my earlier work featuring the 'Road Closed' sign installation, this pair of images similarly spoke to a sense of pointlessness, disappointment and broken things. The decision to display my work in such a manner, small and almost invisible within the space of the crowded exhibition, purposely aimed to pursue the aesthetics of insignificance. Perhaps they would be overlooked, as with the gravestone and the factory. However, the space of insignificance is significant to my practice and my thinking. In this sense, it aligns with Camus' Absurdist philosophy and the figure of Sisyphus endlessly pushing his rock up that hill.[68] There is a certain sense of endurance, repetition and dissatisfaction, yet without fully despairing over the lack of satisfaction – or hope – I decided that I wanted to make a feature of the state of insignificance or disappointment. To announce it in some way.

On my return flight from China, after visiting the abandoned factory, I watched the British film *Breathe*.[69] Based on a real-life story of Robin Cavendish, who was paralysed from polio at the age of 28, the film provides an uplifting tale of endurance in the face of adversity. However, it was not the story of Cavendish that lingered in my mind so much as the use of a particular expression that appears twice in the film. In the first scene, we see Robin and his wife Diane driving in their car. 'It's really a bit of a bugger,' she says. 'What is it?' he responds. 'I'm pregnant,' she responds. Later in the film, Robin is lying in a hospital bed, unable to move or even speak. He mouths some words which are inaudible and which his friend at the bedside is unable to read. Diane arrives and they smile at each other as he mouths the words that she is able to understand. 'He's saying: bit of a bugger'.

Bit of a bugger. While I had come across the phrase before, it struck me as peculiar in the context of this film, voiced as it was in a rather sweet, posh, English accent. It made me think about the many ways in which this word is used: bugger. From the insults that had been hurled at me along with a snowball when I was in my late teens and visiting London for the first time, to being told to 'bugger off' by a random stranger on the tube, to the English Buggery Act of 1533 that defined sexual relations between men as a crime. 'Bit of a bugger' could also describe a kind of disappointment that accompanies a resigned shrug. It was a bit of a bugger that the gravestones remained unfixed, that the road sign was leading to nowhere, that the Queen made that slip of the tongue too loudly and was overheard, that my life is not that exciting and that most of the *Dog Days* series consists of photographs of discounted supermarket food and my pet snake. It was a bit of a bugger when the cheap Daily Mirror plastic cameras failed to function and that when I was over 200 days into the project I opened a new box of cameras to see they were a different design from the rest.

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[68] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), trans. Justin O'Brien (London: Penguin, 2015).

[69] *Breathe*, dir: Andy Serkis, Imaginarium Productions,(2017).

56. Ruidi Mu, *Bit of a bugger: Flight Mode, Peckham*, 2018

Accompanying my two small photographs in the *Flight Mode* exhibition was a third work. Displayed high on the wall, almost touching the ceiling, glowing in bright white light, the neon sign in my handwriting displayed the words: Bit of a bugger. Entering the gallery, its glow was visible on the far wall, but you needed to get close in order to read it. Bit of a bugger as a light, a sign, a statement and as a punchline. Mounted on clear Perspex, the text floats in the space, simultaneously a transparency and a mirror. The background of the work shifts with each installation – in this case it was the white wall of the gallery space – and I am drawn to the thought that wherever it is placed will be interpreted through 'bit of a bugger' as a kind of slogan. This reminds me of Kaprow's short story about the 'hole in a bagel':

> …Harry says, "It's been a long trip, I did time in jail, I got all kinds of diseases, I almost died in Tibet, I was robbed and beaten up… but I found the meaning of life!"
> Mike looks him over and figures he has to play along to get rid of him.

> So he says, “Okay, what’s the meaning of life?” Harry stares deep in to Mike’s eyes and says, “It’s the hole in a bagel.”
> Mike doesn’t appreciate the answer, so he tells Harry that the meaning of life can’t be the hole in a bagel. Harry slowly takes his hand off Mike’s shoulder and gets an amazed look on his face. He says to Mike, “Aha! So life’s not the hole in a bagel!”… And he walks out of the patio.[70]

Kaprow’s bagel gives us a window onto the world that offers either everything or nothing. He has described his own work as ‘funny as hell, and absurd’[71] and these two qualities are something that I aspire to in my own practice and research. It is perhaps absurd that a potato has become the basis for this research project. And yet, for me there is something deeply important in the understanding of absurdity, as a point of view and as a way of making sense of both myself, ourselves and the world. It was the melting ice cubes in *Fluids*, Kaprow’s work that is discussed in the conclusion to Chapter Three: *The Daily Mirror*, that he was referring to in the funny-as-hell quotation above. As the cubes melt away, we are faced with an absurd relationship to time, similar to Tehching Hsieh’s *Doing Time* exhibition. Both of these artists also draw on small discoveries from everyday life in order to make us see subtleties of their lives, and perhaps our own.

Commonalities, gaps and ways of seeing the world. My own work seeks to contribute to this lineage of artists’ work and thinking. But things don’t always go to plan. Things break down. Things go wrong. Things happen.

It was a very hot summer evening and I was riding my bicycle home from the *Flight Mode* exhibition private view, which happened to coincide with the World Cup game where England played Belgium. I think the van driver just ahead of me was quite excited that despite England’s loss in the game they were still through to the next round. He drove past me at a rapid pace and almost close enough to touch. My automatic reaction was to swerve to avoid hitting his vehicle, and as I did so, my front wheel collided with the kerb. I was air-bound, a different kind of flight mode, one which took me over the handlebars and into a crash landing, head-first on the side of the road. I came to in the ambulance, which took me straight into a CT scan, where I was given the good news that my brain was still intact. My chin was stitched up and my face put together, but I couldn’t hear properly and

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[70] Allan Kaprow, ‘‘The Meaning of Life (1990)’ in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), p.225.

[71] Allan Kaprow in Richard Schechner, ‘Extensions in Time and Space: An Interview with Allan Kaprow,’ in *Happenings and Other Acts*, ed. Mariellen R. Sandford (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 224.

even if I could, wasn't sure who to call in the middle of the night. The bit of a bugger seemed immense. More than just a bit – a whole lot of bugger. It wasn't until I heard about the two cyclists who were in front of me on the road that night, who had also swerved to get out of the way of the presumably drunk driver, and who sustained greater injuries than I – both breaking multiple limbs – that I started to feel a sense of lightness. I was very lucky. Like Robert Cavendish, mouthing the words to his wife in Breathe, I could see how things were bad, but they could have been much worse.

塞翁失马，焉知非福
A loss is no bad thing.[72]

57. Ruidi Mu, *Mu, Ruidi, MS: R187600 (Hospital ID)*, 2018

58. Ruidi Mu, *Broken bugger*, 2018

[72] *A loss is no bad thing* is from an ancient Chinese proverb about a lost horse which is found in the Huainanzi text by Liu An, who was the Prince of Huainan, c. 139BC.

I broke myself, and not long afterwards I discovered that my bugger was broken. It was broken because I was broken, and was unable to be present for the de-installation of the *Flight Mode* exhibition. In this sense, it was perhaps a case of art imitating life. Like my chin, the glass tubing of the neon words was smashed and in pieces, hanging off the main structure. The time it took for my chin to heal was fairly similar to the time it took to repair *Bit of a bugger*. Except that unlike my chin, I now had two buggers: broken bugger and new bugger. Another before and after, like the potatoes, like the crime scene, like the Happening. Broken bugger was unable to be fixed, but it became the model for the newly built version. Like Kaprow's *Fluids*, that was recreated posthumously, my bugger seemed more resilient than me in its potential to be remade entirely anew, whereas my chin still bears the scars and I can't quite open my mouth as wide as I used to be able to.

> Nothing sorts out memories from ordinary moments. Later on, they do claim remembrance when they show their scars.[73]

A quotation from Chris Marker's film *La Jetée* (1962) is found on the opening pages of this thesis. It has been on the front page of every draft of this thesis since April 2016. But it was another work by Marker, one that I encountered a few years before embarking on this research project, that perhaps contained the seeds of what was to follow. Something was certainly planted in my mind after viewing a diptych by Chris Marker that was displayed at the Whitechapel Gallery as part of a retrospective exhibition of the French filmmaker's work.[74] Two small images were presented side by side. On the left was *Mourning the Dead (Anti-OAS Demo, Paris, 1962)* and on the right was *Place de la République (Paris, 2002)*. The first image shows a group of people, tightly framed and shot from below. As indicated in the title of the work, it was taken at a demonstration in Paris, and the figures in the scene mostly look towards the camera, somewhat quizzically. In the second image, that was captured in 2002, we see a couple holding hands and a man talking on the phone, bending over a fence or railing. However, it wasn't the figures in these scenes that caught my eye – it was the tree. The tree that makes it evident that we are witnessing the same place, years apart. In 1962, we see a very small, young and fragile stump of a thing, barely visible over the crowd. It seems to be winter and the branches of this little plant are bare. In 2002, the tree is still there, its thick branches now extending beyond the frame of the shot, with large leaves evident at the top of the image. Underneath these two photographs that were presented at

Whitechapel Gallery was a short text by Chris Marker, that read:

> Within these few inches, forty years of my life.[75]

Within these few inches… there was something about that gap, the gap between these two images, in which you could visually see time and understand something about the power of photography. That tiny space between the edges of the print becomes emblematic of so much change in everyday life: generations of change. In between those images, so much has occurred. What was particularly fascinating to me was this understanding of how, through the process of photography, it was possible to see how time grows. And how this might occur as an in-between, rather than as solid, imaged, evidence.

In the gap between my potatoes, the viewer is left to imagine what has occurred to this starchy tuber from one image to the next. In the gap between my visits to Newcastle, things did happen, things which affected the world, but which did not have a significant effect on the gravestones. And yet, things keep happening, not just between the gaps, but also after them. On 22 December 2018, I received a text message from one of the news reporters that I had been in contact with about the unrepaired and damaged gravestones, following my second visit to Newcastle earlier that year. As with the winter solstice, 22 December is also a special day in the Chinese calendar: it is the shortest day of the year, and also the darkest. The text message contained no text, just an image.

59. Chris Marker, *Mourning the Dead (Anti-OAS Demo, Paris, 1962)*, 1962
and *Place de la République (Paris, 2002)*, 2002

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[75] Ibid. See also: *Chris Marker: A Grin Without a Cat*, Chris Darke and Habda Rashid, eds. (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2014).

60. Image received by text message: *Repaired gravestones for the Chinese Sailors, Newcastle*, 2018

I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw the three erected gravestones, all now repaired: the cracks were still visible yet the structures were all finally erect and standing firmly in their concrete supports. In front was a newly printed plaque, sitting on a bed of small rocks, commemorating the restoration of the memorials to the five sailors of the Imperial Chinese Navy. Right in the foreground of the image that the journalist sent me was the edge of the concrete frame which housed the plaque. A very noticeable patch-up job had been applied to that large chip in the front of the concrete structure that I had discovered with disappointment at the time of my previous visit to the site. The much lighter concrete-filler smoothed out the gap where the break had been – which was also the same spot where I had laid the bunch of tulips. It was fixed.

The protagonist in Chris Marker's *La Jetée* is always recalling a moment of tenderness, always looping backwards to the face of the woman, to his own image as a little boy, because even in its delusion these scenes provided comfort in the reality of the post-nuclear war situation that was his present. No actual action beyond his hammock occurs for this character; everything that takes place is happening in his mind. Similarly, in my work the actual actions happen in the present, in the mind of the viewer. My everyday life is my material and through the process of photography, through capturing the

minute and potentially overlooked details of these personal moments which are devoid of my actual visible presence, I can perhaps share something about the gap between me and you. I am the phantom in these images, yet also the one that hopes to prompt a Happening in the dreamland of the viewer. Marker describes the cinematograph as providing a miracle of which only it is capable:

> …making others dream it too.[76]

Strange Phantoms and Fictitious Dreamlands will not provide a way to close the gap, but perhaps it may offer a new way of thinking in between.

[76] Chris Maker, 'Orphée' in *Chris Marker: A Grin Without a Cat*, Chris Darke and Habda Rashid, eds., (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2014), p. 113.

61. Chris Marker, *La Jetée* [still], 1962

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