

How do I know who I am? How do I show who I am?

Ways of piecing the self together

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MA Drawing
Unit 3 Critical Practice Essay
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We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T S Eliot 'Little Gidding' from *The Four Quartets* 1944

Introduction

How can you not know who you are? It seems so basic. Yet my childhood self was so different in knowledge, experience, interests, size, tastes from my current self. Every passing day takes me further from her. Moreover, finding that the events in my memory of my childhood did not match those in the family photographs I have inherited left me feeling that I had lived a sort of double life, partly hidden from myself.

In this essay I want to explore ideas about knowing, constructing and revealing the self. I am searching for a way through the morass of possibilities which will allow me to construct an authentic visualisation of the Self that acknowledges what I know and what is yet to be found.

'Certainly for artists of all stripes, the unknown, the idea or the form or the tale that has not yet arrived, is what must be found.'

(Solnit, 2006, p5)

The path through this MA feels like a search in which, whenever I think I know what I'm looking for, I find that 'that's not really it.' Artist Michael Smith said of his studio and its contents: 'I feel like a full-time clerk, a manager of my own-lost-and-found ...' (quoted in Jacob and Grabner 2010, p28). The idea of the lost-and-found resonates with me in the sense of the re-emergence of interests I had forgotten, and of ideas which complete the circle or take on a new importance in the light of new connections.

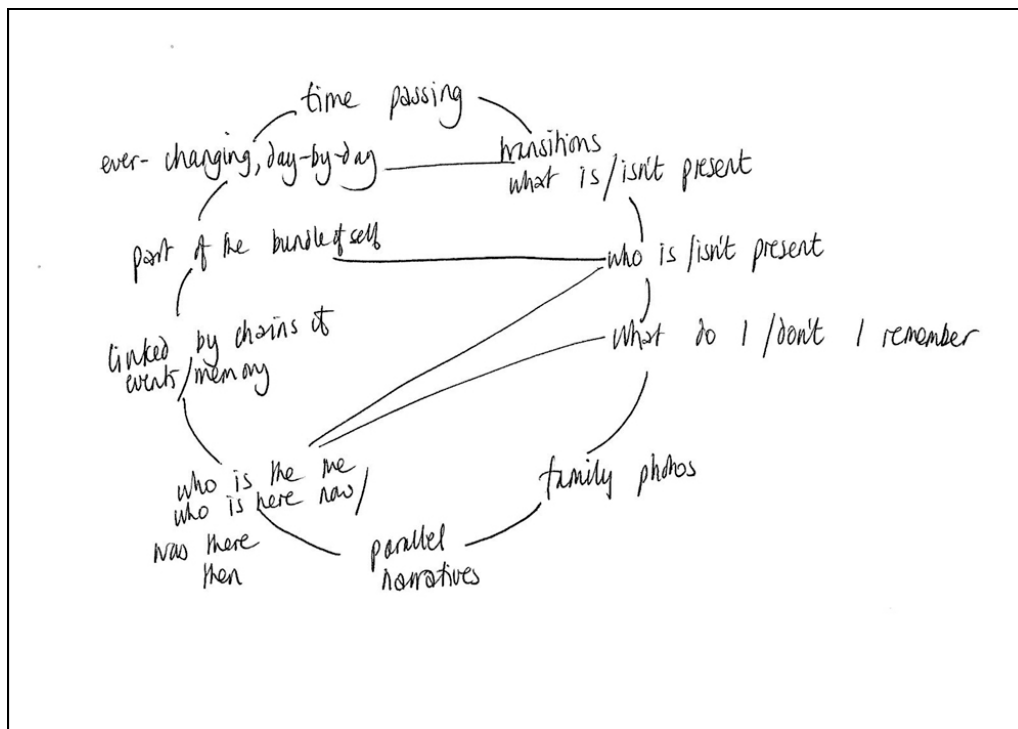


Figure 1: Diagram of research topics flowing from Unit 1 through Unit 2 to Unit 3 March 2017

Presence/Absence

What connects my two previous essays is presence and absence.

Looking at how the passage of time was embodied in a number of art works, I concluded that it wasn't the elapse of time as such that interested me, so much as the movement from moment to moment and the changes that become visible through that movement. It is the movement that places each individual, frozen moment into a chain with an implicit 'before' and 'after', even if I do not know or remember what else is in the chain.

My research into how memory works, especially the prevailing constructivist theory, highlights the importance, the necessity even, of forgetting and the opportunity failures and gaps provide for creativity. Very recent research has found neurobiological and computational evidence that the goal of memory is not so much preserving as much information as possible for as long as possible, but rather optimising decision-making (Richards and Frankland, 2017). For that purpose, what counts is the balance between persistence (recalling over time) and transience (the ability to forget), allowing us to be flexible and to make generalisations.¹

This gives me a new perspective on the gaps in my childhood memories: perhaps the quality and usefulness of what I do remember is more important than what I do not. I have a creative opportunity to fill in the gaps. That does not mean just 'making it all up'. A post-modern approach might suggest that there is little point in attempting a definitive account of what happened in the past, so confabulation is just another available narrative. But I side

¹ The latter point matters because earlier research suggested that the mind creates schemes of meaning and tries to fit new experiences into them (Van der Kolk and Van der Haart, 1995, p169). Richards and Frankland's work suggests that this is more difficult to do if we remember every experience in great detail, so that it seems unique and not 'generalisable'.

with Neisser who argues that ‘it *does* matter what really happened. To manage the present or survive the future, we often need an honest account of the past’ (Neisser, 1994, p2).²

I want to create a fuller but not fictional account of myself. The process that interests me is one of examining and reconsidering the evidence of my past to see what the person I am now can make of it.

(Re)Constructing the Story of my Self

Memory is an important tool for constructing the self, but it isn’t the only one, and indeed even people who can no longer make new memories have a sense of self (Hirst, 1994). Equally important seems to be the concept of narrative, the story we tell ourselves about our life.

Baggini suggests that while we say we construct our sense of self from our memories, ‘in some ways we construct our memories from our sense of self’ (Baggini, 2011, p48); that is, we fill in the gaps to make our memories fit with who we think we are. Perhaps surprisingly Bruner goes so far as to argue that the self is actually narrative in structure: an agent takes action to achieve a goal and overcomes problems (Bruner, 1994, p43). He concludes that ‘Self is a perpetually rewritten story’ (Bruner, 1994, p53)³.

Who we think we are is also to some extent culturally determined: we use cultural models to structure our narrative and then we reconstruct our memories to fit that narrative form (Barclay, 1994, pp57-8). Barclay suggests that remembering is not just the process of retrieving a fixed item; it is an adaptive process ‘through which the constructed and reconstructed past serves present psychosocial and cultural needs’ (Barclay, 1994, p71).

Laub explains that the experiences of trauma survivors can illuminate the mechanisms by which this happens: Holocaust survivors needed to survive so that they could tell their stories, but also they needed to tell their stories in order to survive. Only by telling their stories could they come to *know* their stories (Laub, 1995, p63). Telling their stories, perhaps repeatedly, served their present psychological needs.

From an evolutionary point of view, you would expect memory to store accurate information about the past, so we can use it to help us in the present (Winograd, 1994, p243). But ‘the judicious interpretation of the meaning and causes of [past] events, and inferences about what might or must have occurred’ is also part of the process of recall and this fits with the need not merely to pull information from storage but to shape it into a meaningful story (Ross and Buehler, 1994, p207).

² Baggini suggests that post-modernists ignore the fact that some accounts of the world are ‘better and more truthful than others’ (Baggini, 2011, p93). This is neatly summed up in the anecdote he offers as illustration, involving Georges Clemenceau, Prime Minister of France during World War 1. At the conference at Versailles which agreed the Treaty that formally ended the War, a member of the German delegation wondered what future historians would say about it all. Clemenceau replied: “They won’t say that Belgium invaded Germany.” (Baggini, 2011, p86) Quite.

³ Van Gulick expresses the same idea about the primacy of the narrative, suggesting that the contents of our narrative are not unified because they have been observed or experienced by a single self but the converse: ‘It is because they are unified and coherent at the level of content that they count as the experiences of a single self, at least of a single virtual self’ (van Gulick, 2017, section 9.4).

Lynch describes this process of selection and simplification, of looking for patterns, of identifying important moments and skipping over the dull bits, as an attempt 'to change it [our childhood] into a dramatic recital' (Lynch, 1972, p62). At a practical level, this makes it easier to recall events without having, as it were, to recite everything from the beginning (Lynch, 1972, p120) but I suggest that it is also about elaborating the one, the only story in which we inevitably have the leading role.

Rebecca Solnit imagines the narrative as a landscape, rather than a drama, and makes an important distinction between those which are easy to traverse, with clear open vistas, and those which are not: '... a landscape in which getting lost is easy and some regions are terrifying to visit' (Solnit, 2006, p53). These last regions might represent difficult stories from family history or absence where there should be presence. Yet even this can be turned to use in the Story of Oneself:

'To have such an immediate ancestor who represented mystery and the unknown might perhaps be a gift, generous as the empty air above the prairie is generous, just as some questions are more profound than their answers.'

(Solnit, 2006, p59)

It might be possible, she says, to find out the real story of the missing or mysterious forebear, but 'that is her true story, and mine is that I grew up with these shifting stories.' Similarly, I could question my few still-living relatives of the preceding generation to find more information about my parents' lives and my early life. But my true story is that I have grown up without this. I suggest that it doesn't matter whether I remember the events of my childhood, they are nonetheless what made me who I think I am.

Some things we have only as long as they remain lost, some things are not lost only so long as they are distant.

(Solnit, 2006, p41)

The Shape of the Self

This assertion that I continue to exist even when I have no memory, no evidence of events leads straight to what philosophers regard as a central question: 'the self's continuity in change: how can we remain the same people over time, even as we change, sometimes considerably?' (Baggini, 2011, p3) This section deals with three ideas that offer insight into the mechanism of 'change + continuity' and that suggest visual forms.

A 'dissipative structure' has both form and flow, so it remains in a kind of steady state but with dynamic movement through it, like a candle flame or a whirlpool (Griffiths, 1999, p133). The concept was developed by a Belgian chemist, Ilya Prigogine, and has specific technical application ('Ilya Prigogine', 2017). But the key elements seem equally useful as a way to understand the continuity of the self: an '... open system which is operating out of, and often far from, ... equilibrium in an environment with which it exchanges energy and matter' ('Dissipative Structure', 2017).

Baggini agrees that 'Each of us is an ever-changing flux, not a never-changing core. The solidity of self is an illusion; the self itself is not' - a good description of a dissipative structure (Baggini, 2011, p152). He describes our sense of ourselves over time as 'the story that we tell ourselves that keeps us together'. This autobiographical story is constantly being written and rewritten but that doesn't mean it's a wholly different story. We create a

composite self, a 'bundle of self', which 'means items can come or go or be damaged without necessarily terminally destroying the character of the whole' (Baggini, 2011, p39).⁴

His 'bundle theory' is related to the paradox of Theseus's Ship: whether an object that has had all of its components replaced remains fundamentally the same object ('Ship of Theseus', 2017). But there is a key difference: it is in the nature of human beings to change 'so our continued existence as the same person requires only that there is a steady enough process of change, not that we remain identical in any particular respect' (Baggini, 2011, p140).

Roland Barthes writing about his disappointment in photographs of himself seems to me to reflect that inevitable distance between an image of a person at a single moment and the self that is ever-changing in response to the world:

'What I want, in short, is that my (mobile) image, ... should always coincide with my (profound) 'self'; but it is the contrary that must be said: 'myself' never coincides with my image; for it is the image which is heavy, motionless, stubborn ... and 'myself' which is light, divided, dispersed;...'

(Barthes, 2000, p12)

The bundle metaphor is also used by Tim Ingold who suggests that 'Individual or group, we are composed of lines ... or rather, bundles of lines.' (Ingold, 2011, p14) This develops from his earlier thinking about lines of movement, especially the difference between the trace - a line made as it goes, or as a wayfarer travels - and the connector - a predetermined line going from A to B, like a means of transport (Ingold, 2007, p72-5). If we envisage an organism as a line of movement through the world, then our lives are a bundle of lines, made as we go. The key distinction here is that 'the web of life' is 'not a network of connected points, but a meshwork of interwoven lines', not predetermined but fashioned over time in response to the world (Ingold, 2011, p63).

The Body and the Self

Ingold's idea could be seen as a way of elaborating Merleau-Ponty's view of the human body as constituting the fundamental way of relating to and understanding the world ('Maurice Merleau-Ponty', 2017). The psychological is not separable from the physical; the self is embodied (Baggini, 2011, p123-9).

Bergson's insight was to see how this related to the passage of time, with the body as 'an ever advancing boundary between the future and the past ...', a kind of perpetual threshold where perception meets memory and becomes action (Bergson, 1988, p78). The body is thus continuous through time, and helps to affirm the unity of being (Albright, 1994, p26). Ingold seems to be adding to that a relationship with movement through the world.

This may help to explain the sense of unease arising from the absence of the body, for example, in photographic evidence. Writing about a picture of himself as a boy, Simon

⁴ An interesting parallel (at least to a classicist like me!) would be the way in which epic poetry, like Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, is transmitted in a largely pre-literate society: it is committed to memory in formulaic 'chunks' and recalled in those chunks but with additions, omissions and embroidering according to the intentions of the performer. It therefore recreated, not merely remembered, and it has recognisable narrative shape, identifiable characters and so on, despite the variations. It is therefore different every time but regarded by both performer and audience as the same poem ('Epic Poetry', 2017).

Watney says that it ‘reveals nothing of the terrible secret [his homosexuality] that drove me so deeply into myself for so many long irrecoverable years - years that, without photography, do not exist.’ (Watney, 1991, p28) I recognise that sense of ‘something not being right’ when I look at photographs of my childhood that I know omit key people or parts of the story.

The Photographed Self

I suggest that Watney’s feeling of ‘not-existing’ stems from the sense that memories are a chain that links us step by step to our past (Bergson, 1988, p146). Each moment of experience follows from what preceded it in a process of dynamic flow (van Gulick, 2017, section 4). We often use photographs as evidence of that flow, a chain of proofs of our existence from time to time. In an age of visual media, an absence of photographs feels like an absence of the body, an absence of proof of existence.

Jo Spence said that gaps in her family photographs meant that ‘it became almost impossible to conceptualise my own past beyond a series of anecdotes related to me by parents and grandparents.’ (Spence, 1988,p98) But Annette Kuhn argues that we can move beyond this, not taking photographs at face value but using them ‘as evidence’, so that what we do with them is more about the present, than the past, part of the continuous process of re-writing our narrative (Kuhn, 1991, p18).

Barthes, writing about the precise way in which photographs return us to the past and the past to us, pinpoints a paradox. The photograph does not restore what time has abolished but rather ‘attest[s] that what I see has indeed existed’ (Barthes, 2000, p82) so to that extent it is a witness. But the photograph is ‘never, in essence, a memory ... it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory.’ (Barthes, 2000, p91) Precisely because the actual person or event is no longer present, they and the memory of them are replaced by the photograph.

I am reminded of Rebecca Solnit’s description of the effect of her mother giving her a turquoise blouse bought on a trip to Lake Titicaca when she was two. Her memory ‘collided shockingly’ with the actuality of the garment, especially its tiny size: ‘...the shock was that my vivid memory included what it felt like to be inside that brocade shirt but not the fact that inside it I had been so diminutive, had been something utterly other than my adult self who remembered. ... When I recovered the blouse, I lost the memory, for the two were irreconcilable.’ (Solnit, 2006, p37)

Piecing the Story Together

This theoretical survey indicates that our memories and our sense of self are tied together into a narrative we make and remake.

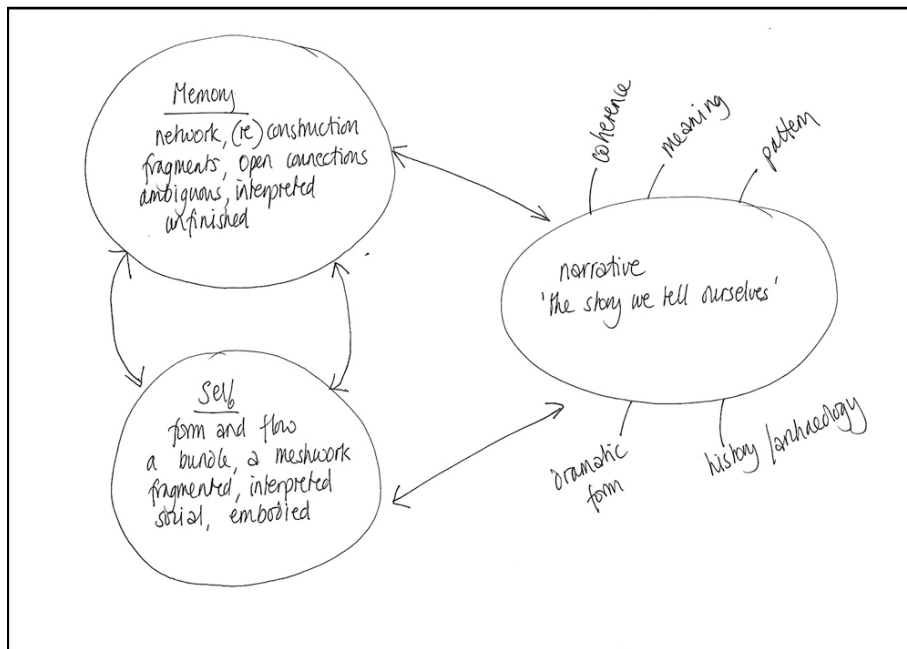


Figure 2: *Putting the pieces together*

That narrative is grounded in real embodied experience but has the potential to unfold in countless ways. I want to consider what kind of strategy could enable me to present an open, yet connected visual narrative of an embodied self which would reflect the potential for reworking and also allow the viewer to make their own connections.

Putting together a collage of work, as part of my Unit 2 Assessment, was intended to give a provisional indication of the elements I wanted to bring together in future work. The simple act of pinning different pieces up showed me that just bringing work into proximity would not necessarily make the kind of connections I had in mind.

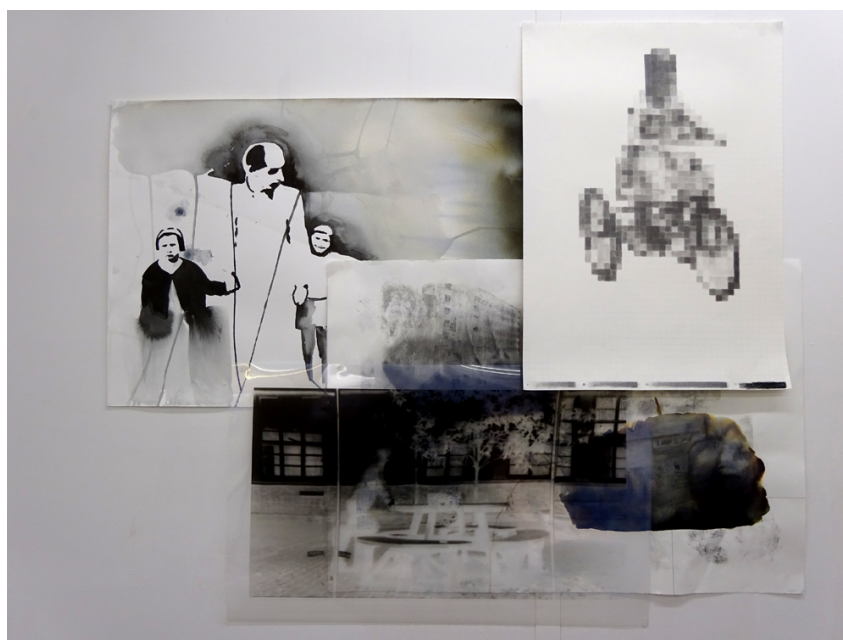


Figure 3: *Unit 2 Assessment collage 2017*: ink drawing of family photo, pixelated drawing, drawing over acrylic photo transfers, pinhole camera photo printed on film

Networks and Connections

Starting with the idea of networks and connections led me to the work of Tomás Saraceno who makes constructions that often reference networks and are the result of experimentation, modelling, even engineering (Manco, 2014, p138). The installation *14 Billions*, 2010, shown in Figure 4, depicts a Black Widow spider's web on a 1:17 scale, using 8,000 strings connected by more than 23,000 knots (Saraceno, 2017a). It is not difficult to reimagine this approach, within a different form, representing a neural network, with each knot a neuron and the strings the synapses connecting them.

Arrhenius says that Saraceno follows the spider's logic in making 'the structure of tunnels, concentrations, nodes, offshoots and patterns'. That has, of course, a specific purpose: to function as a trap (Arrhenius, quoted in Saraceno, 2017a). What strikes me is that once Saraceno has constructed the web, it is fixed. Obvious, perhaps, but what it means is that it lacks the intrinsic potential for reworking.



Figure 4: Tomas Saraceno *14 Billions*, 2010: string; dimensions variable, here 400 m³

Another Saraceno work, *On Space Time Foam* 2012, shown in Figure 5, overcomes this in a way. It is a floating structure with three membranes, between 14 and 20m above the floor, creating three levels accessible to the public. Each visitor's movement sets up a wave motion, interacting with the waves created by other visitors, an idea drawn from quantum mechanics and the movement of subatomic particles. The whole structure makes these interrelationships visible so the piece is constantly being reworked (Saraceno, 2017b).

Outside a virtual world, this is possible only with materials and structure that allow real-time change. Otherwise, my conclusion is that no single network, on whatever scale, can entirely replicate the plasticity of memory or the self. So I need to stop looking for the perfect network.



Figure 5: Tomas Saraceno *On Space Time Foam* 2012: plastic film, inflated; 3 layers, each 400m²

Constructing the Present from Memory

I wanted to avoid bringing Louise Bourgeois⁵ into my research, because surely there could be nothing left to say. But thinking about Saraceno's spider's web leads inevitably to her and to the spider, used extensively in her later decades to 'stand for the perpetual principle of repair and renewal' (Küster, 2011, p29).



Figure 6: Louise Bourgeois *Installation view of Louise Bourgeois Rooms at Tate Modern 2017* featuring at left *Spider* 1994 and at right *Cell (Eyes and Mirrors)* 1989-93

⁵ Full details of the works in the photographs are in the bibliography.



Figure 7: Louise Bourgeois *Installation view of Louise Bourgeois Rooms at Tate Modern 2017* featuring at left *Spider 1994* and rear centre *10am is When You Come to Me 2006*



Figure 8: Louise Bourgeois *Installation view of Louise Bourgeois Rooms at Tate Modern 2017* featuring rear left *A l'Infini 2008-09*, centre *Single II 1996* and right *Spider 1994*

Gibbons writes that for Bourgeois ‘the function of memory is not only to recall, reconstitute or reconcile the past but also to construct and represent the present.’ She links this with the concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, which describes the resurfacing of a repressed memory at a time when the experience could be revived as part of the healing process, strengthening the sense of self in the present (Gibbons, 2007 p16-17).

Seeing Bourgeois’ work in the rooms in Tate Modern reveals a strong sense of coherence; while the materials and nature of the pieces varies hugely, I feel a sense of repetitive struggle hangs heavy over them all.

Writing about Giacometti and Bacon, Morris remarks on how their personal obsession drove them to create ‘remarkably coherent bodies of work, sustained over the courses of their lifetimes, as if each work, once achieved led them immediately back to a reconstitution of the same obsession.’ She suggests that Louise Bourgeois’ repeated return to childhood trauma works in the same way (Morris, 2003, p31).

Apparently, Bourgeois herself explained, that ‘the sense of exorcism which follows a confronting of these memories in a new work returns her, in its wake, to a renewed experience of the trauma.’ (Morris, 2003, p31) This reminds me of Laub’s work with Holocaust survivors (discussed above on p4) for whom telling their story becomes a way to survive. He says this can become ‘itself an all-consuming life task’ which seems an apt description of much of Bourgeois’s work.

I would take issue, though, with Morris’s statement that ‘Each work is a summation of past and present and a propulsion into the future’. It could just as well be argued that the future is a constant return to the same place, never actually propelled anywhere else.

Yet, in other work, Bourgeois offers a more hopeful outcome. She is quoted by Küster as saying:

‘I need my memories. They are my documents. I keep watch over them. ... You have to differentiate between memories. Are you going to them or are they coming to you? If you are going to them, you are wasting time. Nostalgia is not productive. If they come to you, they are the seeds for sculpture.’

(quoted in Küster, 2011, p43)

In the series of etchings *A l’Infini* the subject matter is ‘the principle of human life that consists of many similar but never identical constellations of encounters’ (Küster, 2011, p112). He links the weaving lines and knots in the images with the tapestries Bourgeois would have seen in her parents’ textile restoration shop. Bourgeois’ assistant Jerry Gorovoy saw these images as representing ‘the passage of time, how life is a continuous thread and a path to be navigated: there are many routes and one may get lost along the way. The work is about self-discovery and knowledge of the self ...’ (quoted in Küster, 2011, p113). I suggest that this is verging on the same territory as Ingold’s idea of the meshwork (see above p7) as a network of indeterminate form, fashioned over time in response to the world. The etchings demonstrate that strongly repetitive work can represent openness and mobility.



Figure 9: Louise Bourgeois *A l’Infini* 2008-9: detail

What we may be, What we may become

Of the many issues raised by Francesca Woodman's work, I am most interested in that of perception and self-perception: what or who tells us who we are (Als, 2015). Or even, perhaps, whether we exist at all.

Conley suggests that Woodman's ghostly images, like that in Figure 10, show what it would be like to feel or even be invisible, to be a ghost, to 'feel oneself disappear'. She suggests that Woodman 'visualizes the surrealist idea that many identities coexist within the self and that the self may project outward onto the surrounding environment.' (Conley, 2013, p155) On this reading Woodman is merging into the wall. However, Townsend argues that in this series we cannot tell whether the body is 'imprisoned within and then consumed by space, rather than being ejected by it. ... the body could be going in either direction.' (Townsend, 2006, p20)

Keller describes the body as being 'always on the verge of disappearance.' but it could equally well be always on the verge of appearance. (Keller, 2011, p178) It is that ambiguity that interests me in relation to finding imagery that represents potential, the moment of slippage from one thing to another.



Figure 10: Francesca Woodman *House #3 Providence, Rhode Island 1976*: photograph, gelatin silver print on paper; 14x14cm

It seems to me that this state of suspension is what Roland Barthes describes thus in relation to photographs of the self generally:

‘.., the Photograph ... represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an

object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a spectre.'

(Barthes, 2000, p14)

I suggest that Woodman was making an image of Barthes' photographic process, something I think is also present in my own long-exposure work, as in the example below.

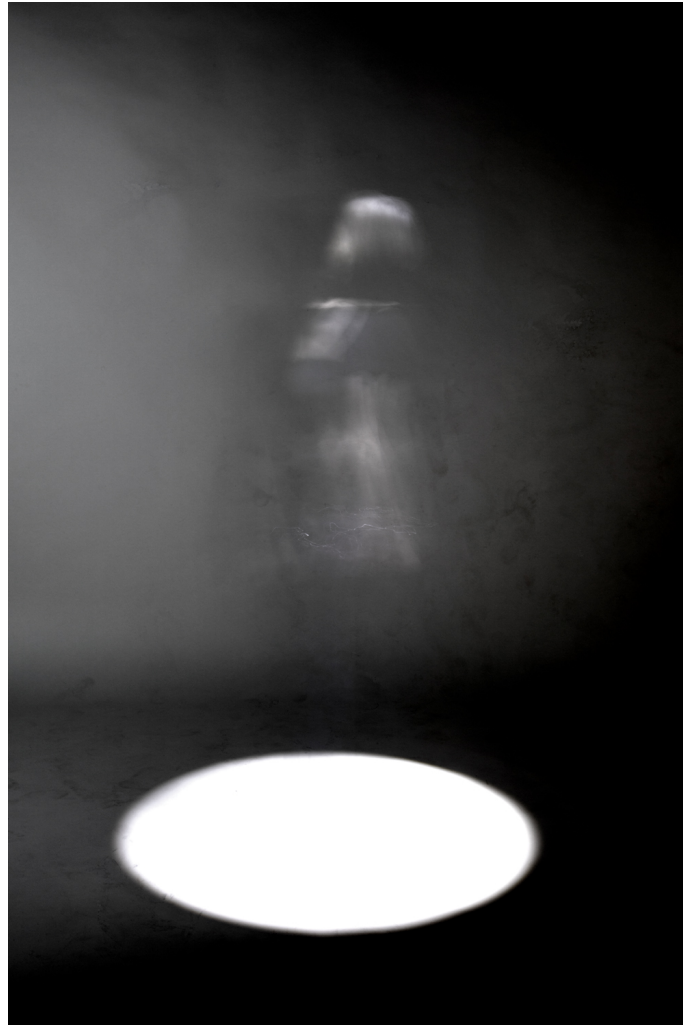


Figure 11: Su Bonfanti *Immaterial* 2017: long-exposure digital photograph; 30x42 cm

In other images Woodman uses blurring to create an image of the body that is at once recognisably real yet ghostlike (Conley, 2013, p167). Conley goes on to suggest that images like Figure 12 render the body as 'Everybody', with the blurring conveying an experience of blending in with the surroundings (Conley 2013, p166-7). I agree that the blurring removes the specificity of the figure but I find it hard to see the gesture here (or in other similar images) as a merging with the surroundings. It seems more like an exploration of the space, or the interaction of body and space.

Referring to a series of photographs taken in Rome in 1977, Townsend says that it 'reflects on the production and erasure of the photographic subject through light' (Townsend, 2006, p15). Moreover, a photograph made with long exposure 'that emphasises duration within the single frame rather than the flicker of sequential frames that constitutes filmic temporality, is resolutely an *anti*-photograph', in the sense that it is not Cartier-Bresson's

'decisive moment' (Townsend, 2006, p47). The movement shows the viewer that time has elapsed, not *pace* Conley that the subject has become one with their surroundings.



Figure 12: Francesca Woodman *Space² Providence, Rhode Island 1975-78*: photograph, gelatin silver print on paper; 14 x 14 cm

It is the movement, using the body to draw in space, that creates an image of the body both 'real and ghostlike', one that can never have existed in a single moment but perhaps captures a sense of potential within the single body.



Figure 13: Su Bonfanti *Still 2016*: composite of 4 long-exposure digital photographs; 90 x 75 cm

Pixelation: Who is hiding what?

I stumbled into using pixelation when I zoomed in on my figure in a childhood photograph to see how much detail I could discern. Thomas Hirschhorn's recent work uses pixels to 'link the hidden with the known', (KunstHal Aarhus, 2017).



Figure 14: Thomas Hirschhorn *Pixel Collage no 10*, 2015: prints, plastic sheet, tape; 343 x 422cm

Hirschhorn sees pixelation as a source of authenticity or authentication: 'A pixelated picture must surely be authentic if it has unacceptable areas which are concealed. The acceptable is not-pixelated.' (Galerie Chantel Crousel, 2016) Using partial pixelation in works like Figure 14 is 'proof that apparently somebody is taking care, has the overlook, knows and decides what is acceptable and what is not.' He rejects the idea that pixelation is a way of protecting either the subject or the viewer. For Hirschhorn, pixelation is always an 'authoritarian gesture', infantilising or manipulating.

I would challenge this absolutist view, as he himself seems to do when he claims that he is not using pixels to hide anything but to explore the extent of abstraction which could 'build up a new form' and become a truth 'reaching beyond information' (Galerie Chantel Crousel, 2016).

For me the loss of information through pixelation represented uncertainty: I could recognise the child in the photo as me but I remembered nothing about when or where it was taken, the dress I was wearing or even about having a tricycle. These facts are hidden - *from* me, rather than *by* me. The drawing becomes something 'reaching beyond information', sliding in and out of focus for the viewer and suggesting that while we cannot know everything about an event, we can nonetheless place it in our narrative.



Figure 15: Su Bonfanti *Freewheeling*, 2016: graphite on paper, 60 x 40cm

Potential and Flow

If I am resisting the idea that there is one networked form that could represent the totality of my memory or narrative, that is not to say that form doesn't matter. Sarah Sze says of her sculpture that she thinks 'about the absence of form as much as the presence' and that she wants to achieve a certain improvisation. She describes this as 'precariousness' because that 'implies the potential to go somewhere.' (Enwezor, Buchloh and Hoptmann, 2016, p009-0016)

When I first looked at her installation for the Venice Biennale 2013, I was struck by the same problem as with Saraceno's spider's web: once the artist has put everything in place, the work cannot be **re**-worked. But Sze undercuts this limitation by considering the sequence through the installation. She says she:

'knew exactly what you'd see before and after each piece. It was really in the transitions from one room to the next that the meaning was created. It's a very filmic idea: the meaning happens in the edit. It's not the raw footage or material, but how you edit it, what happens between the frames. That moment of emptiness is actually where the meaning happens.'

(Enwezor, Buchloh and Hoptman, 2016, p034)

I would argue that this approach acknowledges that while you cannot give precise form to the immensity of potential, you can make room for it in the 'space between'.

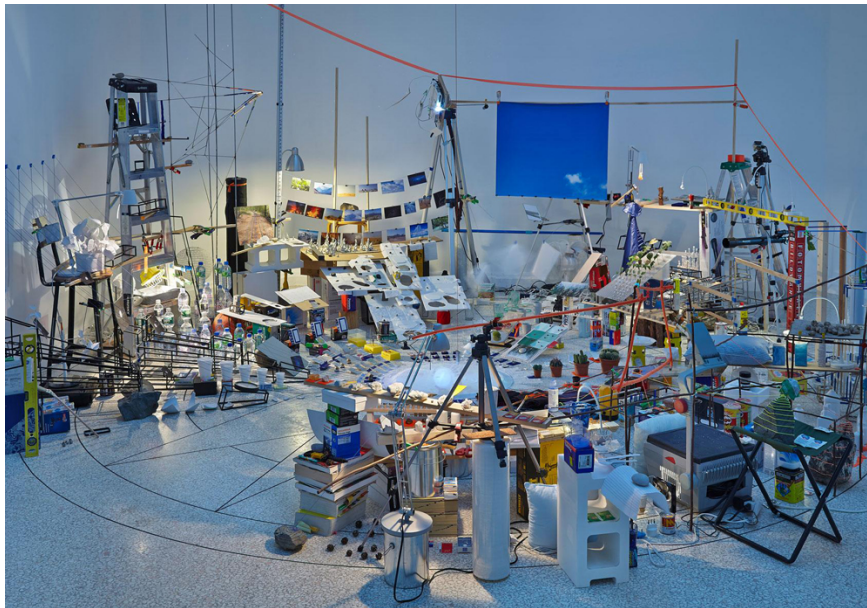


Figure 16: Sarah Sze *Triple Point Pendulum* 2013: salt, water, stone, string, projector, video, pendulum, mixed media; dimensions variable.

What you don't know you saw

The idea of editing being key emerges in the work of Breda Beban, a Serbian artist who fled to the UK in the 1990s. During her flight, she made a series of 36 photographs of places where she and her partner stayed. Each set of four within the series consists of images of the bed, the window, the view from the window and a blown up detail from the view. As Searle notes, these are on the face of it 'unremarkable images' (Searle, 2000, p2)

Beban herself talks about editing of film and photograph as being 'a process of trying to make sense out of the material generated' and how this happened when she saw on the monitor what had been captured (Jankowicz, 2008). Darke points out that the fourth image in each set results from finding, after the event, a detail that had been captured without Beban being aware of it (Darke, 2000, p38).

Betterton links this with the idea of trauma being precisely an experience not fully grasped at the time, only later, and often characterised by flashbacks. She suggests that the fourth image is that flashback, showing us something that was there but hidden in the image all the time. The return to the image is an attempt to 'master what was never fully grasped in the first place' (Betterton, 2005, pp24-25).⁶

For Betterton, Barthes' *punctum* in these images is 'the residual sense of presence' represented by the unmade bed, and referring to Beban's partner who died between the time the photographs were taken and their processing and display (Betterton, 2004, p26).

⁶ I would argue that the comparison with traumatic flashback should not be pushed too far, as in the case of PTSD it is not clear to me that the image is hidden, even though the event is not fully assimilated (Caruth, 1995, pp4-8).



Figure 17: Breda Beban *I Lay on the Bed Waiting for his Heart to Stop Beating: Fibbiano Montanino, Tuscany, September 1991 2000*: C-type prints, each 30.5 x 20.5 cm.

I want to argue for a wider reading of the *punctum* here, going back to Barthes' original formulation of 'a kind of subtle *beyond* ...' (Barthes, 2000, p59). This would encompass both the absent presence and the detail that was not initially noticed. Jankowicz suggests this is 'the subjective eye being the more effective agent of truth as it rifles through and alters material' (Jankowicz, 2008).

In the context of photography, where more data is captured than is immediately apparent, there is always a 'subtle beyond'. The two versions of *Of my Better Nature* below illustrate this: the first is as it initially emerged, the second after processing. The experience of finding or recovering an image where I thought there was none could be a metaphor for the recovering or constructing of a memory.



Figure 18: Su Bonfanti *Of my Better Nature* 2016: long-exposure digital photograph; left original data, dimensions variable; right final image, 90 x 30 cm.

Conclusion

In this essay I have shown that theoretical propositions about the nature and continuity of the Self can provide a framework for considering how to visualise the Self.

I started with a formulation that contained the seeds of its own impossibility: what kind of strategy could enable me to present an open, yet connected visual narrative of an embodied self which would reflect the potential for reworking and also allow the viewer to make their own connections. The flaw is that any single strategy can capture only one version of our 'perpetually rewritten story'.

Adopting a single approach would be like expecting a single image or memory to bear the weight of a lifetime. So I need to stop looking for one.

In making work for the MA show and beyond, I conclude it would be more productive to use the elements I have considered here - networks, construction, repetition, pixelation, blurring, ambiguity, the open-ended and the hidden - to construct one piece of my story at a time, constructing and re-constructing my process as I rework the past in the light of the present.

Capturing the whole at one moment is beyond my grasp. There will always be more to find, more than I can find.

'Blue is the color of longing for the distances you never arrive in...'

(Solnit, 2006, p30)

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