

1-1-2002

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Intimation of Life: Photographic Portraiture in Art

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BA (Design), Grad Dip (Media Studies)**

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of
Master of Arts (Creative Arts)**

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Date Submitted: August, 2002

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Abstract

Photographic artists have a continuing desire to express intimately aspects of their social world through the genre of portraiture. However, in attempting to make known the lives of those around them, portraitists encounter a range of complexities inherent in the representation of the human subject in a two-dimensional visual field. Portraits were initially an indicator of social class until the introduction of photography, when more and more people became involved in their production and ownership. It was at its inception that the photographic portrait assumed conventions consistent with those of the painted portrait in Western art and its social use. These conventions have persisted and, along with the accumulation of conventions specific to the medium, have come to define photographic portraiture as a genre.

It is either from within the limitations of the genre, or through the challenging of its authority, that artists seek to portray issues relevant to contemporary life. This endeavour is affected by certain concerns associated with a person's photographic representation. These include issues pertaining to notions of likeness, identity, subjectivity, and realism. A photographic image of someone has traditionally been perceived to convey a realistic impression of that person's identity, however, concepts of identity and realism have come under increasing scrutiny, contesting the authority of the photographic representation. The portrait's verisimilitude is also undermined by limitations in photographic processes and technology, and the manipulation and control exercised by the photographer who can frame, filter, crop, and enlarge the image at will.

In considering the inadequacies of the medium, the fragmentation of identity and subjectivity, and threats concerning the demise of the genre, a further concern to contemporary portraiture is the status of the psychological interaction between photographer and subject. For many participants this exchange is an important aspect of the portrait transaction in which rituals of pose and performance are enacted, and feeling states or emotional truths are sought out. Kozloff (1994, p. 4) considers still portraits to be scanty objects in which the intricacies of human experience are inadequately represented, yet they remain as a site for the documentation of experiences that are to become memories. The increasing influence of digital media in photography presents an opportunity for the re-evaluation of these concerns, and new creative and expressive possibilities.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text;
- iii) contain any defamatory material.

Signature.....

Date.....30/8/02

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank to Dr Christopher Crouch for his help toward the completion of this thesis.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.....	ii
Declaration.....	iii
Acknowledgment.....	iv
 Introduction.....	 I
 <u>Part 1: A Background to Photographic Portraiture</u>	
Chapter 1: Definitions and Use.....	8
Chapter 2: Historical Survey.....	13
Chapter 3: Convention and Ritual.....	19
 <u>Part 2: Photographic Portraiture in Contemporary Art Practice</u>	
Chapter 4: Challenging the Portrait's Authority.....	27
Chapter 5: Examples of Contemporary Practice.....	41
Chapter 6: Application.....	51
 Conclusion.....	 61
 Epilogue.....	 67
 <u>References and Images</u>	
References.....	71
Images A - O.....	74

Introduction

Portrait photography melds together three broad disciplines whose separate and inter-related concerns imbue the genre with both a sincerity in its goals and doubts as to their veracity. The genre combines the medium of photography, the psychology inherent within the portrait transaction, and the incorporation of, and function within, Western visual art practice. Price and Wells (1997, p. 25) suggest that a portrait's iconic nature, when articulated through established aesthetic conventions, "fuel realist notions associated with photography. Thus philosophical, technical, and aesthetic issues - along with the role accorded to the artist - all feature within ontological debates relating to the photograph." While key debates may be the progeny of a particular discipline, in this essay they will be discussed together to determine their overall effect on the genre as a whole. This will provide the underlining theme running throughout the essay which centres around ways in which contemporary artists negotiate notions of truth, identity, and representation in a desire to intimately express their social world through portrait photography.

Part One seeks to investigate portraiture's historical and formal background and its incorporation into photography. A discussion of historical debates and practices is a means to better understand ways in which contemporary photographic portraiture operates and is thought about. Such will be the focus of Part Two which will look at the state of identity and representation and how photographic artists are negotiating these ideas in their contemporary practice.

Commenting on its intricacies, Clarke (1997, p. 102) describes portrait photography as "the site of a complex series of interactions - aesthetic, cultural, ideological, sociological, and psychological." The portrait photograph is dependent on its reading within these contexts in order to establish its meanings as an image and an object. In its formative years in Europe, Britain, and America during the nineteenth century, factors such as social and cultural changes, early photographic techniques and practices, emerging industrial systems, new technologies, and the codes and conventions implicit within Western art had a significant effect on portrait photography's standing in society. Writing of its early popularity, Tagg (1998, p. 50) refers to photography as being "a great industry resting on the base of a vast new clientele and ruled by their taste and their acceptance of the conventional devices and genres of official art."

Tagg is referring here to the explosion of commercial interest in amateur photography in the decades following its invention. Introducing a discussion on portraiture, Woodall (1997, p. 6) suggests that photography emerged from a need through visual means to "characterize more ordinary people." In turn this "soon admitted an unprecedentedly wide clientele to portraiture, enabling people who could not previously afford, or were not considered worthy of, painted immortality to have their features recorded for posterity" (Woodall, 1997, p. 6).

The commercialization and democratization of portraiture through photography was a significant development in the genre's history. Before the inception of photography in the nineteenth century, portraiture had been equated with oil painting. The advent of the photographic portrait created a dichotomy between its relationship with the portrait in oils as "an individual text and the photograph as part of a populist and democratic form of representation" (Clarke, 1997, p. 103).

The portrait in oils was perhaps at its peak in England and France during the eighteenth century. A huge quantity and variety of images were produced, "ranging from refined domestic 'conversation pieces' to images of professionals alluding to progressive intellectual endeavour, or overwhelmingly large and splendid evocations of monarchs and great lords" (Woodall, 1997, p. 4). As well as these established aristocratic functions, portraiture was crucial to the "cultivation of civility in commercial society . . . achieved by pictured affection and communication, or by the similar formats and group display of portraits depicting figures united and defined by their civility" (Woodall, 1997, p. 5). Along with its depiction of likeness, portraiture also came to be valued as a cultural practice during this period, for as Woodall (1997, p. 5) relates; "sitting to a fashionable portraitist entered into literary discourse as a self-conscious, socially prestigious interaction."

In contrast to its industrious practical output, the genre's status within academic theory was low. This was due to the degree to which artistic invention was deemed to be lacking in portraiture. According to Woodall (1997, p. 5), the coinciding of image and reality in the portrait "denied any fabrication on the part of the artist." The portraits ambiguous position in the history of visual art was because it did not use its imitative skills in the service of higher imaginative ends; "its end was itself imitation, and

mechanisation seemed to put this end more firmly within the range of the least skilled artisan" (Gage, 1997, p. 120).

The genre's poor status within the academic hierarchy during the eighteenth century echoes its problematic relationship with art institutions in the nineteenth century. Photography's ability to capture likeness to a degree never before imagined was both revelation and anathema for portraiture. Realism and truth were central issues in nineteenth century portraiture, and photography, satisfying the desire for a transparent, scientific likeness, "was considered to guarantee an inherent, objective visual relationship between the image and the living model" (Woodall, 1997, p. 6). However, photography's early attempts to be considered as Art were hindered by claims against the very process which made such objectivity possible. The image recorded by the camera was seen as being mechanically produced "and thus free of the selective discriminations of the human eye and hand" (Price & Wells, 1997, p. 20). It was on these grounds that "the medium was often regarded as falling outside the realm of art, as its assumed power of accurate dispassionate recording appeared to displace the artist's compositional creativity" (Price & Wells, 1997, p. 20).

Pictorialism was a movement that began in the 1850's to address problems thought to reside with photography's mechanistic nature "by reducing the signifiers of technological production within the photograph" (Price & Wells, 1997, p. 22). Price and Wells (1997, p. 22) point out that in an effort to imitate the appearance and subject matter of oil painting, practitioners would create out of focus, blurred, and fuzzy images of allegorical subjects such as religious scenes. The emphasis on 'artistry' lasted until the end of the nineteenth century, during which a time of challenge to dominant aesthetics caused the decline of the Academy's authority. It was at this point that the "traditional aesthetics, to which the Pictorialists subscribed, came to seem increasingly conservative" (Wells, 1997, p. 210).

The Pictorialists' artistic pretensions were also driven by a desire to distance themselves from casual amateurs, an emerging mass market brought about by the introduction of cheaper and easier to use technologies such as roll film and the box camera. The field of portraiture was especially popular for amateur photographers, and like other genres, became divided into several levels of practice "whose most privileged strata . . . are called 'Art', whose middle ground ranges from 'commercial art' to 'craft',

and whose lower registers are designated 'kitsch', 'vernacular', 'amateur' or 'popular culture'" (Tagg, 1988, p.19).

Wells (1997, p. 203) suggests that the status of nineteenth century photography was centred around art and technology, the expressive and the mechanical, being viewed as distinct from each other. With the dissolution of these boundaries in the twentieth century, especially since the 1970's, "the question of the status of photography as fine art has become increasingly complex - or increasingly irrelevant (depending on your viewpoint)" (Wells, 1997, p. 203). It is now commonplace to view a variety of lens-based media, including photography, video, slide projection, and installation, within the contemporary gallery environment.

This essay will not specifically address the question as to what is meant by 'Art,' although certain aspects of this debate will be alluded to through discussion of the artist's role in portraiture, their relationship with their subjects, the objectives or aims of their practice, and issues around the consumption of portraiture by the viewer. In general terms, discussion of these issues will be aligned with or opposed to Wells' (1997) definition of 'Art' as:

fine art practices relating to the gallery and the Arts establishment, by contrast with more general understandings of photography as an 'art' or expressive skill Art tends to be acclaimed for its perception on the condition of humankind. The artist is characterised as a special sort of 'seer', or visionary of 'truth', poetically expressed. In the case of photography, the artist is viewed as transcending 'mere recording' of events, offering a unique perspective on or insight into people, places, objects, relationships, circumstances. (p. 202)

However, the realization of artistic vision and notions of 'truth' are complicated by the necessary negotiation of the conventions and institutions which give images their meaning. The genre of portraiture and the photographic medium itself have their own conventions and terms of reference, both of which "imply a series of assumptions, of meanings, accepted (and sometimes questioned) as part of the signifying process: a photograph (via the photographer) can reaffirm or question the world it supposedly mirrors" (Clarke, 1997, p. 31).

How and why a photograph has meaning is something photographers have increasingly questioned in the twentieth century. Examples of the codes and conventions

that we may take for granted, such as those concerning composition, pose, presentation, etc., are discussed in Chapter 3. These conventions originate from the painted portrait and theories of physiognomy developed in the nineteenth century. For example, Tagg (1998, p. 35) points out that many poses are three-quarter views tending to frontality featuring heads and shoulders “as if those parts of our bodies were our truth. We hardly question the theories of physiognomy on which such sedimented notions rest.”

Photographic portraiture can be divided into two distinct categories, those being formal and informal. An informal approach is where the photographer becomes involved in the subject’s social environment. These portraits tend to be derivative of the snapshot in their spontaneity, realistic premise, and celebration of the moment. Alternatively, formal portraiture may be seen as a more constructed or controlled picturing of a subject’s pose. In either approach, the photographer perceives a mode of working that is personally challenging and which has the potential to achieve a certain understanding of the subject. The portraitist might enjoy the unpredictability of a subject or close observation of the human physiognomy and its uncontrollable moods (Kozloff, 1994, p. xvi).

Both of these approaches show a desire by photographers to express intimately aspects of their social environment. However, these types of practice may also draw attention to the inability of photographic portraiture to represent the artist’s social world accurately. Kozloff (1994, p. 4) suggests that “a still portrait photograph is a scanty object.” Aware of the psychological aspects of posing, the complexities of human experience, and the limitations of the photographic process, he believes that “most portraits fall short as probes of character and identity” (Kozloff, 1994, p. 35). Given the difficulty of combining the history and conventions of the genre with the complexities inherent in photographic visual language, how effective is the representation of personal intimacies through photographic portraiture?

How artists contend with these issues will be discussed in Chapter 5 which will look at the portrait practice of photographers Nan Goldin, Richard Billingham, Thomas Ruff, and Thomas Struth. The original context of their work, the forms in which it is finally produced, and the visual language in which it operates are factors which place it within a cultural discourse. These exterior elements are in themselves conventions of contemporary visual culture that in turn effect the reading of the subjects they portray.

An aspect of the depicted subject is the viewer's access to the intimate nature of the portrait act, and how much psychological ground is transferable in the displayed image. Kozloff (1994, p. 40) points out that "portraits still leave a great deal unsaid - the greater part of what we want to know." What is it that we hope to find out from a portrait? Canetti (cited in Kozloff, 1994, p. 40) suggests that; "the outer bearing of people is so ambiguous that you only have to present yourself as you are to live fully unrecognized and concealed." It may be the seductive impenetrability of the portrait that gives it its power. Instead of the depths that are withheld, portraits more often offer us mysteries that can't help themselves.

In an introduction to a portrait exhibition catalogue, Pitts (1991, p. 7) asks, "how does an image of an individual convey personality or character?" He continues by contemplating; "one of the persistent questions about portraiture has been whether an image that captures 1/200th of a second of someone's life can be anything more than topographical . . . inherently superficial" (Pitts, 1991, p. 7). Do contemporary artists still hope to express personality and character through a two-dimensional silent image, or are these aspects of the photographic portrait now redundant in relation to its scope in the early twenty-first century? If so, where does that leave the emotive interplay between the photographer and the subject in the portrait moment, and any expectation that this relationship is able to be represented to, and read by, the viewer?

Through an investigation of relevant historical debates in relation to portrait photography, and a discussion of current issues and practice, I hope to develop a better understanding of the genre and its place within contemporary Western art. In turn, this research will benefit the development of my own art practice within this field, a discussion of which will take place in Chapter 6. Issues covered in this essay that are of particular interest with regard to my own practice include those concerned with; the transaction between photographer and subject; representation of identity with respect to portrait conventions; the slipperiness of portraits when used as evidence of intimate relationships; and conventions relating to the presentation of the photographic object within the gallery environment.

Part 1: A Background to Photographic Portraiture

1. Definitions and Use

An obvious question to begin with is what constitutes a portrait? Portrait photography is itself informed and influenced by a wide range of other genres. Personal documentary photographs, family snaps, posed shots, candid shots, formal studio photographs, and fashion images, all with their own codes and conventions, can be in some way connected to aspects of portrait photography. An interpretation of some of the issues concerning the nature of portrait photographs, particularly in art, will be discussed further in Chapter 4. At this point it is important to note that a specific genre carries with it its own set of histories, practices, ideological assumptions and expectations which shift over time to take account of changing cultural formations. For De Salvo (1995, p. 31), portraiture is "a container for many things - a signifier of status, wealth, social class, a way to capture likeness, a way to catalogue people."

To understand the genre of portrait photography more clearly we must first define what is meant by the word 'portrait.' In this instance portraiture will be defined in terms of Western portrait painting which preceded and informed photographic portraits. Portraiture can be seen as a complex cultural construct that attempts to portray identity through various codes of representation. A portrait is often equated with likeness, however in her definition of 'portrait' Campbell (1996, p. 274) points out that; "a recognizable image of a model is not necessarily a portrait, and likeness cannot be the only determining factor in defining a portrait."

Campbell's examples are based on sixteenth and seventeenth century paintings from the western canon. One such early form of portraiture whose characteristics in some ways prefigured those of photography was the miniature. The term applied to both paintings in manuscripts and small independent paintings, mostly portraits, that developed in the sixteenth century. Painted mainly in watercolour, gouache, or enamel, miniatures were popular in the Western world for nearly four centuries due to a fundamental desire for likenesses in a small format (Reynolds, 1996, p. 638). Favourable characteristics of miniatures were the delicacy of their execution and their size, which meant they became personal possessions that could be carried or worn. These attributes meant the portraits "were able to convey a more intimate interpretation of character than the more formal and public presentation proper to a large-scale oil painting" (Reynolds, 1996, p. 638).

Campbell's main point is that however accurate, the model's likeness as represented by the artist is not a portrait unless the artist has shown an interest in the identity of the model. Campbell considers a less detailed likeness is still a portrait if the painting is intended to be recognized as a representation of the chosen subject. She quotes Gere (cited in Campbell, 1996, p. 275) who stated that a portrait is an image "in which the artist is engaged with the personality of the sitter and is preoccupied with his or her characterization as an individual." Further distinctions include paintings where the depiction of a subject's likeness, rather than being a portrait, is intended as a study of themes such as sainthood or lunacy. Images of beautiful people also present problems of classification as the paintings may be a representation of the ideal of beauty rather than of the individual. Campbell also cites instances where individuals painted after death have had a model's features substituted for their own; "such figures, intended to be instantly recognizable as individuals, are in some sense portraits, even if they cannot be likenesses" (Campbell, 1996, p. 276).

Campbell relates how artist Albrecht Durer (cited in Campbell, 1996, p. 276) saw one of the primary purposes of portraiture to be that "it preserves also the likeness of men after their death." Before the invention of refrigeration it had been impossible to preserve human heads in recognizable forms, so the artist came to play an essential part in the process of commemoration and immortalization. Even if no attempt was made to conserve the corpse, "an artist could carve or paint an image of the deceased person, which could be displayed on or near the tomb" (Campbell (1996, p. 276). This custom is echoed today whereby some tombstones incorporate a photographic image of the person buried beneath.

Traditional portraits painted by artists were mainly used by the sitters themselves, their family, or friends. Over time collections of ancestral portraits would be built up to glorify the antiquity of the family. However, until the introduction of photographs, the availability of portraits was limited to the rich, the artists themselves, or those who were on friendly terms with the artist (Campbell, 1996, p. 277). An example of the importance that was placed on portraiture is given by Portuguese painter Francisco de Holanda in 1549. Campbell (1996, p. 278) relates how de Holanda "justified portraiture by saying that, as an imitation of God's work of creation, it was the highest of the arts, but quickly added that only the distinguished deserved to be portrayed."

By the nineteenth century the portrait was still equated with painting and the aristocracy. According to Clarke (1997, p. 103), the portrait in oils was "a highly privileged medium, by its very nature confirming status and declaring significance - it was the assumed distillation of a personality." He observes that the painted portrait was a study over time where individual meaning is established through a series of codes and symbols by which the self is framed and advertised (Clarke, 1997, p. 103). The photographic portrait, by comparison, is an instantaneous capturing which records the undiluted moment as a suggestive representation. Clarke (1997, p. 103) states that "the portrait in oils claimed to give a composite, even definitive, image of the personality - a formal representation in which was embodied an assumed status and public significance."

Brilliant (1991, p. 8) discusses his definition of portraiture in terms of it being "a particular phenomenon of representation in Western art that is especially sensitive to changes in the perceived nature of the individual in Western society." His argument is based on the relationship between the portrait and its object of representation, and the importance of this relationship in reflecting social dimensions of human life. He simply defines portraits as being intentionally made of living or once living people in a variety of media. Such media may include paintings, photographs, sculptures, medals, cartoons, and prints. In their particular media, portraits may survive over a long period of time and their images may be transferred to other media and replicated in vast numbers, such as on postage stamps (Brilliant, 1991, p. 8).

It is important to isolate some of the core concepts in Brilliant's definition of portraiture. These are that a portrait is a work of art, made by an artist, for an audience (Brilliant, 1991, p. 8). The audience or viewer is acknowledged by Brilliant as an important part of the portrait process, but equally important in the production is the role of the artist. Brilliant (1991, p. 9) also recognizes that the constituents which make up a person's identity are many and include appearance, a given name, social function, characterization, and distinctions and relationships between individual identities. Of these only physical appearance is naturally visible, and even this is unstable, while the others are conceptual and must be expressed symbolically (Brilliant, 1991, p. 9). However, it is the representation of all these elements that he sees as the important role of the portrait artist, "who must meet the complex demands of portraiture as a particular challenge of their artistic ingenuity and empathetic insight" (Brilliant, 1991, p. 9).

For Weiermair (1994, p. 9), 'portrait' refers to the classical form in which a dialogue exists between photographer and subject "where behaviour and relationship, procedure and result are determined by both parties." The concentration on artists' "private desires, human interest in the model as 'other' or the eternal fascination with the human face as mirror of the soul" (Weiermair, 1994, p. 9), can be seen as a continuation of traditional ways of thinking about portraiture. Do contemporary artists still align themselves with these ideas, and if so in what ways are they relevant today?

In defining his idea of legitimate portraiture Kozloff makes a distinction between vernacular and serious modes. The majority of portraits fall into the vernacular category where their use is primarily in the service of everyday social functions, such as passport photographs, photographs of politicians, or photographs of students on graduation. In the case of the vernacular image, while the moment of the pose reflects the individuals appearance, it also establishes a social role for that person, who could be interchanged with any other (Kozloff, 1994, p. 4).

Conversely, it is the subject's personal theatre which characterizes serious portraiture. Kozloff (1994, p. 3) suggests that when sitting for a photograph a person will project a special, isolated, and artificial version of their own personal theatre. A significant retreat from this concentrated bearing, a falling back into unself-conscious activity, or an immersion within the subject's own time, would result in the portrait being correspondingly weakened (Kozloff, 1994, p. 3). This would show that subjects "had a purpose other than revealing themselves to us . . . they did not allow their personhood to be appropriately congealed and legitimated" (Kozloff, 1994, p. 3). In such circumstances Kozloff believes the resulting images would not be portraits.

Finally, what is a portrait from the viewer's point of view? What does the viewer look for and what do they see? What portraits have in common is their subject matter which is usually centred around a person or a group of people. Their two-dimensional image presents an opportunity for the viewer to get as close as possible, and to stare for as long as they like in what De Salvo (1995, p. 22) believes is "rarely accorded in everyday public life, where we abruptly look away once our gaze has been returned. In the work of art, it is with the return gaze that we begin." Brilliant also sees as fundamental the necessity to express the relationship between the portrait image and the human original. For him the enduring fascination of the portrait lies in "the oscillation

between art object and human subject," that when represented so personally "gives portraits their extraordinary grasp on our imagination" (Brilliant, 1991, p. 7).

2. Historical Survey

Portrait photography has its roots in a diverse range of social histories and scientific inventions that began to converge in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Although the concept of the camera obscura¹ and knowledge of light-sensitive chemicals had been known for many years, there was little desire to fix the image permanently. However, from the 1790's, Batchen (1990, p. 8) describes the concept of what-was-to-become-known-as-photography to be "a demonstrably widespread, social imperative." These social and scientific forces culminated in 1839 with the public announcements in France and Britain of the first photographic processes.

Batchen's claim is confirmed by McQuire (1998, p. 18) who believes the reason for the immediacy of the camera's public acceptance was that "photography seemed to fulfil a deeply rooted desire for realism." This sentiment is reinforced by Woodall (1997, p. 6) who writes that; "the need for a transparent, scientific likeness also seemed to be met by photography, which was considered to guarantee an inherent, objective visual relationship between the image and the living model."

Photography soon came to hold an important place in society, although along with its immediate popularity arose "debates concerning its aesthetic status and social uses" (Price & Wells, 1997, p. 19). Rosenblum suggests that photography's first major inroad was in portraiture. While painted portraits were traditionally expensive objects, commissioned by the wealthy as evidence of their position in life, Rosenblum (1996, p. 659) indicates that "with the emergence of a middle class of merchants, factory owners and bureaucrats, the need for less expensive methods arose."

Changing social forces, combined with improving photographic technology, began to play a significant part in the development of photographic portraiture. In the bourgeois household of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the standard portrait in oils "was to confirm an ideal of the sitter (proclaiming social standing, embellishing personal appearance)" (Sontag, 1978, p. 165). Given that this was their purpose it was unnecessary for owners to have more than one portrait of a particular individual. The

¹ The camera obscura was used as an artist's aid, it offered an inverted image of reflected light which could then be traced (Clarke, 1997, p. 12).

photographic record, however, simply confirms that the subject exists; "therefore, one can never have too many" (Sontag, 1978, p. 165).

The rise of the middle and lower-middle classes towards greater social, economic, and political importance also contributed to the demand for portraiture. For centuries the ownership of portraits had been the privilege of a few, however the new middle classes in Britain, France, and America began an increasing desire for them. Tagg (1998, p. 37) suggests a reason for this was that 'having one's portrait done' became "one of the symbolic acts by which individuals from the rising social classes made their ascent visible to themselves and others and classed themselves among those who enjoyed social status." The rise of these classes and their demand for portraits, for the description of individuality and the inscription of social identity, spurred manufacturers and inventors to seek new ways in which this demand might be satisfied (Tagg, 1998, p. 37).

Before the advent of photographic processes the desire for portraits was met by a thriving trade in the production of painted miniatures. The portrait miniature was required to incorporate the signifiers of the aristocratic portrait while maintaining a price within the resources of the middle-class clientele (Tagg, 1988, p. 38). The most obvious way to keep the price down was of course for the portrait to be small in size and quick to paint. The miniature pose was therefore most likely to be restricted to a three-quarter view of the head and shoulders with the main focus being the face. Using this model, a large number of painters could earn their living by painting thirty to fifty portraits a year for a modest price (Tagg, 1998, p. 39).

The expanding middle-class demand for portraiture soon outstripped available painted means which led to the development of more mechanical methods (Price & Wells, 1997, p. 20). A pre-photographic example of the shift towards mechanical processes can be seen in the *Physionotrace*. It was invented by Gilles Louis Chretien in 1786 and combined the cut-out silhouette and the engraving, two modes of portraiture in use at the time. The value and fascination of these mechanically produced portraits was their unprecedented accuracy. So while mechanisation guaranteed their cheapness and availability, it also confirmed a kind of authenticity. Tagg (1988, p. 40) suggests that these qualities were clues not only of "the potential of photography as a system of multiple reproduction, but also of its claims to offer a mechanically transcribed truth."

By the 1830's a strong social need for photography had developed alongside a cluster of technical inventions and innovations which included "inventions in the electrical industries and new discoveries in optics and chemistry" (Price & Wells, 1997, p. 19). While the technology and demand existed for a camera and lens based means of image capture, experimentation focused on how to fix the image once it had been obtained. Mande Daguerre was one of the first to successfully combine the available technology with a chemical process to create a 'photograph.' He unveiled his process - the daguerreotype - in France in 1839, celebrating its ability to reproduce nature. Tagg (1988, p. 41) draws attention to the idea that the photograph seen as a direct cast of nature "was present from the very beginning and, almost immediately, its appeal was exploited in portraiture."

Initially the daguerreotype process could only be used for capturing inanimate objects, as the exposure time of half an hour made portraiture impossible. With continuing advances in light sensitive chemicals and optical technology, exposure times were reduced to less than ten seconds, allowing people's likenesses to be captured in previously unimaginable detail. Up to this point there had still been a small number of miniaturists making a living, but by the 1850's their business had been taken over by a growing number of photographic studios opening in both Europe and America. Miniature painting "was quickly made extinct by the magically cheap appearance of the daguerreotype's exact, shiny portraits" (Batchen, 1999, p. 11).

The popularity of the new medium drew miniature painters, draughtsmen, engravers, and artisans to set themselves up in the portrait business. However, many problems still existed for the portraitist; the daguerreotype was difficult to duplicate; its surface was so fragile it had to be protected in a case; exposures were too long, resulting in rigid expressions and an absence of liveliness. Despite the disadvantages of the process, Rosenblum (1996, p. 660) suggests it was the brilliant and precisely defined miniature image of the daguerreotype that "attracted large numbers both as practitioners and sitters, setting the stage for the commercialization of portraiture."

Tagg (1998, p. 43) estimates that more than ninety per cent of all daguerreotypes taken were portraits. Shopkeepers, lesser officials, and small traders found in photography a new means of representation that was appropriate for their economic situation. Such numbers created for the first time "an economic base on which a form of

portraiture could develop which was accessible to a mass public" (Tagg, 1998, p. 43). This increasing mass market and its desire for better quality, faster production, and lower prices eventually led to the demise of the daguerreotype and its British cousin, the calotype, during the 1850's.² New processes, such as the collodion negative, required shorter exposure times and could be duplicated in the form of an albumen print which was more permanent and less costly than a daguerreotype. These new processes proved more accessible to amateurs and led to "an unprecedented expansion of portraiture on all levels" (Rosenblum, 1996, p. 661).

Carte-de-visite, patented in 1854 by Andre Adolphe Eugene Disderi, was a small-format portrait which included several poses on a single sheet. Its popularity was due to its naturalism and low cost. Rosenblum (1996, p. 661) suggests that this enabled those on a lower income "to sit for their own portraits and to own photographic portraits of friends or relatives." By appealing to the lower end of the market Disderi attracted a whole class of people who sought to compare themselves against the image of their social superiors. In order to remain affordable to its market the production of carte-de-visite photographs were formulaic. Posing was standardised and quick which resulted in pictures that were too small for faces to be observed in detail. Many of the operations of the carte-de-visite used unskilled labour while increasing productivity, thus laying the foundations for "a mass production system in which the actual photographer was no more than a labourer" (Tagg, 1998, p. 48).

It is at this point in the history of photographic portraiture that we can begin to define three broad streams of practice branching from the genre's early evolution. The carte-de-visite, a format which encouraged the use of elaborate albums in which to store photographs of friends and celebrities, can be seen as a precursor to the family oriented and highly industrialized form of amateur photography pioneered by George Eastman's Kodak company. Such commercialization became possible through the introduction of new high speed materials, such as gelatin dry plates in 1878, which decreased exposure times to snapshot speeds. This in turn rendered the tripod dispensable, allowing cameras to be hand held for the first time. Further progress was in the formation of a photo-finishing industry which took over the development of the exposed plates. From 1888 successful exploitation of these developments saw Kodak cameras being sold to a whole

² The calotype was announced by William Henry Fox Talbot in 1839. Unlike the daguerreotype, the calotype used paper as the basis for producing a reversed negative and then a positive image (Turner, 1996, p. 658).

section of society who had never before taken photographs. Now Eastman could reach a mass market via a fully industrialised process of production whereby "instead of going to a professional portraitist, people without training or skill now took pictures of themselves and kept the intimate, informal or ill-composed results in family albums" (Tagg, 1998, p. 54).

In opposition to the informality of the *carte-de-visite* and amateur photography were the portrait studios. They offered a more prestigious service and larger format prints in order to distinguish their wealthier clients from the cheaper end of the market. Some recruits to this industry were portrait artists who had previously lost their livelihood to the rise of photography. They brought to their new vocation artistic pretensions which helped raise the status of their portrait production. An example is Nadar, a former writer and caricaturist, who opened a studio in Paris in 1853. He attempted to cultivate an intimacy with his clients reminiscent of the traditional relationship between artist and patron. Nadar aspired to create work that went beyond mere reproduction in the hope of achieving "a really convincing and sympathetic likeness, an intimate portrait" (Tagg, 1998, p. 53).³ However commercial portrait studios, who had initially displaced engravers and miniaturists, were themselves forced out of business by the increasing popularity of snapshot photography. Many survived by also catering to the amateur market, a form still prevalent today.

The 1880's also heralded the introduction of half-tone plates which enabled the unlimited reproduction of photographs in newspapers and magazines. While the Kodak camera had transformed informal portraiture, so illustrated papers ended the trade in pictures of celebrities and public figures made popular through the *carte-de-visite*. This began the era of throwaway images. Tagg (1998, p. 56) cites Walter Benjamin's concept of the 'cult' value of the picture being effectively abolished due to the photograph becoming so common as to have been rendered unremarkable.⁴ Some practitioners however, seeing a greater importance in their work, attempted to raise photography to the status of art. This began with movements such as Pictorialism and Naturalism in the later half of the nineteenth century, and was maintained at the turn of the century by groups like the Linked Ring in England and the Photo-Secession in the USA. These groups

³ See Image A, p. 74.

⁴ Tagg (1998, p. 56) refers to Benjamin's argument that mechanical reproduction processes separated art from its base in cult so that photographs became "of passing interest with no residual value, to be consumed and thrown away."

sought to express personal ideas and emotions through special printing techniques that imitated the fine arts. In so doing they hoped to imbue their photographs with an artistic 'aura' that would distinguish their work aesthetically from commercial portraits and amateur snapshots.

The industrialization of photography provided a greater variety of social uses for the photograph. Sontag (1978, p. 8) suggests it was due to this industrialization, and reaction against these social uses, "that photography came into its own as art." With the increasing confidence of photographers in the fine art movement, and through the efforts of Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession, photography eventually gained acceptance as "a viable means of artistic expression as well as a utilitarian procedure" (Rosenblum, 1996, p. 675). It is photographic portraiture in terms of its use within the field of artistic expression and critique which is of particular interest in this essay.

3. Convention and Ritual

Artists working in the genre of portraiture have the opportunity to question or critique those codes and conventions which influence the way they work. American artist Chuck Close (cited in Wise, 1981) believes that:

art is just a bunch of conventions and traditions that you either use or choose to ignore. In one way or another, we're reacting to them or against them, but we are tagged onto a long list of conventions, many of which were arbitrary in the first place, but now have become a given, the thing that we all agree on. (p. 43)

This chapter will cover some of the conventions and rituals of photographic portraiture which artist, subject, and spectator alike must negotiate. The codes and conventions which underlie the presentation of work will also be discussed, along with the gallery environment in which it is exhibited.

At its inception, as previously noted, the photographic portrait was closely linked to the portrait in oils. Consequently, the photographic portrait became encoded with the conventions that characterize the painted portrait, with its heritage in traditional Western art. As Clarke (1997, p. 19) points out, "photographs are placed in categories (or genres) which further codify their terms of reference and status." For example, an 'art' photograph involves a different set of assumptions than a 'documentary' photograph. Clarke (1997) continues by suggesting that:

the extent to which so much photographic practice has been haunted in its development by what has been termed 'the ghost of painting' is crucial, for photography established, from the outset, genres and hierarchies of significance related to painting. It institutionalized the artistic and professional aspects of its meaning in terms of an academic tradition. (p. 19)

Such institutionalization can be seen to have taken place in the early efforts to establish photography as a fine art. This is noted by Price and Wells (1997, p. 22) who point out that "if the photographs aspired to be Art, their makers aspired to be artists and they emulated the characteristic institutions of the art world."

The ways we order and control space through the camera relate to various aesthetic and cultural principles. Portrait photography inherited some of these principles, such as compositional conventions which inform aspects of its size and shape, from the language

of painting. Although initially limited by the means of its production, the photograph's small size nevertheless made it popular as an intimate personal possession, a quality previously exploited by the portrait miniature until it was displaced by the new technology (Reynolds, 1996, p. 645). More recently, large scale prints, such as those by Thomas Ruff, establish parallels with the tradition of European painting that echo the grandiose and the epic. Two obvious painterly genres ascribed to the frame of a photograph are the 'landscape' format (horizontal), and the 'portrait' format (vertical). While the photograph can be cropped and enlarged at will, Clarke (1997, p. 22) reminds us that even though different shapes of prints were used in the nineteenth century, "photography did not deviate from the principles of Renaissance perspective and centring embedded in the history of painting."

Within the genres of portrait painting and photography there are continuities in aesthetic convention, as can be seen in the compositional techniques of point-of-view and framing. The point of view will most likely be at eye level, although the depiction of a bust from below eye level is "a common device to create an artificial sense of stature" (Berger, 1995, p. 91). The sitter will most likely be framed as a bust or perhaps full body, either front on, three-quarter view, or in profile. The framing of a subject in profile suggests a direct allusion to the aristocratic conceit of the strict profile portrait, while a sharp close-up of the face suggests introspection (Berger, 1995, p. 91).

While some principles of the photographic portrait have been influenced by Western portrait painting, other conventions are distinct to the photographic medium itself or have been borrowed from other photographic genres. Unlike painting, photography was more successful in capturing the likeness of the sitter, and was valued for its "apparent escape from convention and the greater naturalness offered by the mechanical process" (Holland, 1997, p. 121). This belies the true nature of camera technology, such as the standard practices to which it lends itself, and the manipulations that can be imposed throughout its processes. Most exposures will take place at a particular height above the ground, commensurate with the height of the photographer's eye or their tripod. The format in the view-finder is usually arranged to be parallel to the horizon line, while distance from the portrait subject will on most occasions be within a certain range that allows for a sense of intimacy without infringing the subject's personal privacy. Photographers working in the genre of portraiture have incorporated techniques and structures used in other photographic genres such as documentary, photojournalism,

fashion, and advertising. These may include strategies and effects such as "fill-in flash, colour, scale, captioning, sequencing, and the use of text within the image" (Wells, 1997, p. 231).

Aspects of appearance, pose, and performance are central to the portrait genre and may have much to do with the subtle interaction between social and artistic conventions. Brilliant suggests that portraits exist at the interface of art and social life where both artist and subject are under pressure to "conform to social norms" (Brilliant, 1991, p. 11). This is reflected in the prevalent formality of private portraits which show "the constraints imposed by the conventions that govern one's appearance in public and before strangers" (Brilliant, 1991, p. 11). This gives rise to questions regarding the portraits appearance. Do the subjects represented reflect the expectations of the viewer, the artistic concerns of the photographer, or aspects of themselves? The seriousness of many formal portraits may not necessarily be typical of the subjects as individuals but designed to conform to the expectations of society (Brilliant, 1991, p. 11). The portraits imagery "combines the conventions of behaviour and appearance appropriate to the members of society at a particular time, as defined by categories of age, gender, race, physical beauty, occupation, social and civic status, and class" (Brilliant, 1991, p. 11).

Common conventions more specific to formal as opposed to informal portraiture are those to do with composition and expression. The tendency toward a lone subject shown centrally and frontally within the composition is an extremely repetitious form of portrait presentation. Thus depicted, and despite the affect to realism, the subject is rarely captured smiling, talking, or moving. Brilliant (1991, p. 10) suggests that the very human act of speaking "splits the face wide open, but portraits rarely show this because the genre operates within social and artistic limits." On the whole, according to Brilliant (1991), portrait artists:

eschew the representation of strong expressions of feeling because traditionally they are thought to reflect transitory states of being and are therefore an obstacle to the artist who seeks to capture the essential stability of the self, existing beneath the flux of emotions. (p. 112)

Portraitists also tend to avoid negative expressions. Instead, formulaic expressions may be used to signify such attributes as intelligence, strength, determination, assertiveness, affection, and others. While the communication of personality traits through the picturing

of expression is questionable, the sanitizing of facial expression "allows the successful portraitist to encase his subjects within the masks of convention" (Brilliant, p. 112).

In formal photographic portraiture, pose and performance are important aspects of the portrait moment. This is the moment where a complex psychological exchange occurs between sitter and portraitist, the pose and performance being the site where this interaction coalesces. Kozloff (1995, p. 96) believes that in the moment before exposure sitters are required to prepare themselves as appropriately as they can, "for they know that each impression is registered and concluded with each opening of the shutter. The ritual in which they are involved is discontinuous, filled with one or more 'takes,' from which there is no appeal." This furnishes the genre with complexities peculiar to the photographic medium, especially in regard to the portrait moment, which seem to oppose the intentions implicit in the painted portrait. For a sitter in a painting, each moment slides imperceptibly into another, for as Kozloff (1995, p. 96) explains, their figure is not recorded by light on film in a particular instant, but "is summoned and pictorially created at the behest of a mind." While the portrait painting is slowly built up over time, the portrait photograph is the product of an interchange between the photographer and the sitter at a specific moment. Residue of this moment is encapsulated in the resultant image which "comes to us as a trace of circumstances which the two parties consciously shaped together at that fugitive instant, and no other" (Kozloff, 1995, p. 96).

Portrait performance is a key element in Kozloff's understanding of the interchange between sitter and photographer. Kozloff (1995, p. 96) sees the portrait moment as an extract from the course of the life lived by the sitter, but while the photograph succeeds as a physical witness of that moment, it is "less privileged than a painting in its ability to endow the subject with a symbolic guise." Along with the vagaries of timing and mood, these considerations lead Kozloff (1995, p. 96) to suggest that chances are high "the extract from the sitter's life might prove to be trivial, random or unrepresentative." This possibility is reduced in portrait photography through a familiar device known as the subject's 'performance.' Kozloff (1995, p. 96) defines this as "a mode of behaviour induced or constructed and staged for the occasion of the portrait." 'Pose' and 'performance' both refer to the same situation in which the sitter is photographed, but inflect it differently, for as Kozloff (1995, p. 96) explains, the sitter poses *for* an audience while performing *as* themselves.

A pose is the way a subject is arranged in a pictorial space which may include a display of the subject's accessories and possessions. It is a temporary state which involves "the placement of the body independent of any attitude that is struck or of facial affect" (Kozloff, 1995, p. 98). During a portrait session a subject's pose is affected by their immediate physical conditions and their relationship with the photographer. A sitter may lean on or reach out to objects in their vicinity, while physical comfort within a space may guide the position of the limbs, "affected by a self-consciousness that assumes gestures" (Kozloff, 1995, p. 98). The pose will also be influenced by directions given by the photographer, restraints of time and place in which the portrait occurs, and the personal chemistry between those involved.

According to Kozloff (1995, p. 100), it is these conditions which determine the quality of a subject's performance, since for the viewer to read portrait performance as confident and relatively at ease with itself, the subject being photographed would require some degree of psychic comfort during the portrait's production. The 19th century portrait encounter is the antithesis of Kozloff's idea of portrait performance. Due to the limitations of the equipment and the need to portray a subject's dignity and status within the bounds of social class, sitters were deprived of any chance to seem to be someone. Kozloff (1995, p. 100) suggests that "one suffered the portrait ritual . . . in a form of strenuous display about as much open to speculation and personal disclosure as a statue." In contrast to early portrait experience, Kozloff (1995, p. 103) suggests that normal portrait performance can be both seductive and inconclusive. In pictures, human beings reflect a mix of self-projected and self-contained behaviour although, regardless of their extroversion or reserve, subjects remain difficult to interpret as social beings either in pictures or in life (Kozloff, 1995, p. 103). So given the contrary nature of a portrait's interpretation, what makes them so special? Kozloff (1995, p. 103) believes that it is "the working of its artifice, through which the sitters' energy is directed, for appearance's sake, to enact a representation of themselves."

Central to this process is the psychological interaction that occurs between the subject and the portraitist during the portrait ritual. Unless influenced by a more documentary or candid approach, most portrait photographs could be described as historical visual traces of the collaborations and compromises that occurred between the two parties. Kozloff (1995, p. 98) suggests that, since both parties invest something in the portraits' production, it is unlikely they act as free agents. Their separate interests

shape and confine each other, which suggests that the portrait ritual "is a power combine, and if brought off on friendly, civil, professional, corporate or adversarial terms, is apt to reflect something of the psychology of such relations, along a sliding scale of intimacy" (Kozloff, 1995, p. 98).

Finally, a mention needs to be made of the portraits final journey into the public realm. The frisson between photographer and subject, and the works conceptual thrust, is now introduced to a third party: the viewer. In terms of the public presentation of the art object, the viewer's interaction with the work usually takes place in a contemporary art gallery. The way in which photographs are viewed in the gallery environment is also the result of historical influences and conventions. In the late 19th century when photographers sought to establish their work as art, they displayed their images 'salon style' in much the same way as paintings and prints (Wells, 1997, p. 212). Victorian gallery conventions emphasized quantity of work over the singularity of a specific image, and to this end photographs "were hung from floor to ceiling with little regard to size or frames" (Wells, 1997, p. 212). In addition to this, Wells (1997, p. 212) reminds us that galleries were not painted white and lighting was limited compared to today's standards, which suggests that viewing work, especially when hung high or low, would have been difficult.

The Pictorialists, with their concern for detail in the finished print, "were instrumental in introducing changes in the gallery, emphasising the presentation of the picture" (Wells, 1997, p. 212). Some of the contributions attributed to the Pictorialists were that photographs became more uniformly and less heavily framed than before, more wall space was made available for each picture, and hanging space was restricted to the central area of the wall (Wells, 1997, p. 212). By the 1980's these conventions were being questioned too, since photography galleries that had established a foothold in the 1970's had only been designed to exhibit the standard format image (Wells, 1997, p. 228). In the 1980's in England, new, larger-scale photo-media galleries became key institutions in new debates which meant the standard photograph became harder to show; high roofs in large gallery spaces dwarfed smaller pictures (Wells, 1997, p. 228). The choice of scale also determines how work is perceived within the gallery space; "very small-scale work, carefully mounted and framed, inherits the sense of the precious associated with miniature painting" (Wells, 1997, p. 228). Alternatively, large-scale photographic works claim the status traditionally accorded to academic painting, for as

Wells (1997, p. 228) explains; "such pictures engage with contemporary myth in ways which echo the ideological and political involvements typical of classical painting."

Other factors which contribute to the dialogue between the portrait and the viewer within a gallery space include its framing and accompanying text. The mounting and framing of a picture is not neutral. According to Wells (1997, p. 229), "framing contributes to the rhetoric of the image through delineating the edge of the picture, that which is put into the frame," while it also acts as a border to differentiate the work from the wall. Wells (1997, p. 229) also points out that "the established convention in post-Renaissance Art of framing paintings means that the frame also signifies the special status of a picture." Written text commonly accompanies photographic portraits and may be in the form of wall mounted labels or a printed catalogue, and usually includes information such as titles, dates, dimensions of the work, and artists' statements. However, accompanying text is not simply a descriptive anchor for the image, for as Wells (1997, p. 230) argues, "writing constitutes a further signifier within the complex interaction of discourses with which the spectator engages." Wells (1997, p. 230) suggests that titling, and the artists' signature, contribute to the images claim for the status of Art.

Part 2: Photographic Portraiture in Contemporary Art Practice

4. Challenging the Portrait's Authority

Since photography's inception portraitists have been concerned with capturing in a single image the assumed 'inner' being of a their subject. A portrait's quality is then defined by how well a sitter's character has been revealed. Clarke (1997, p. 101) suggests that this leads to a dilemma intrinsic to the portrait photograph: "in what sense can a literal image express the inner world and being of an individual before the camera?" This idea pre-supposes that 'inner' being can be represented visually, and consequently recognized by the viewer. However, in the twentieth century critical debate and contemporary practice has questioned the terms by which an individual can be 'expressed' or 'known' through the photographic portrait (Clarke, 1997, p. 115). For example, any literal representation as part of a surface response ignores the complex psychological inner space in which the self is held (Clarke, 1997, p. 111). Some of the issues involved in the portrait photograph's exploration for the 'true' identity of the subject are discussed in this chapter.

Likeness and Identity

Naturalistic portraiture, particularly that of the portrayed face, is central to the portrait genre in western art. For Woodall (1997, p. 1), naturalistic portraiture is a "physiognomic likeness which is seen to refer to the identity of the living or once-living person depicted." She suggests that concepts of portrait likeness are complex and historically conditioned due to the early practice of photographic portraiture, and photography's ability to produce an exact resemblance of a person (Woodall, 1997, p. 19). The authority of the resemblance as a representation of the sitter's identity was reinforced by the science of physiognomy.

During the nineteenth century Europe was at the height of 'physiognomic culture' which cultivated the pseudosciences of physiognomy, phrenology, and pathognomy. This culture was dominated by the belief that "a person's character, subjectivity, or even soul could be read in the features of the face (physiognomy), the shape of the skull (phrenology), or the expressions of the emotions (pathognomy)" (Sobieszek, 1999, p. 17). The arrival of photography in the late 1830's was greatly responsible for continued public and scientific fascination with this idea that the outward signs of a persons face could communicate that persons inner character (Sobieszek, 1999, p. 17).

With this culture already in place, photography's popular success immediately following the daguerreotype's invention is perhaps not surprising. The opportunity afforded by the photographic image for the study of a person's character, through the shape and expression of their face, may have spurred interest in the nascent technology. However the repercussion of these explorations was an onrush of banal likenesses (Sobieszek, 1999, p. 18). In order to counteract this trend and bring life and expression back into the portrait, some practitioners sought to embellish their work with aesthetic flourishes such as careful lighting and atmospheric backgrounds. Other photographers had the opposite impulse which was to strive for "direct, exact, and unmediated likenesses" (Sobieszek, 1999, p. 18). We see here a distinction between those who sought to invoke a response from the viewer through their work's artistic quality, and those who thought that photography's mimetic quality alone afforded it the capacity to communicate a sitter's inner self. This latter belief dominated photography's early years to the extent that the camera was even credited with the capability of "eliciting or extracting the hidden soul of its subject" (Sobieszek, 1999, p. 19).

Most early portraitists, especially those who aspired to artistic status, were aligned to the belief that the camera could reveal the subject's inner nature. It was considered that "all things in nature had a language and a soul, and that the role of the artist was to contemplate and portray this inner character, particularly of the human subject" (Sobieszek, 1999, p.20). This concept of portraiture lasted throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. While it was initially accepted that a portrait was a likeness which referred to the identity of the sitter, the history of portraiture has been "closely connected with changes in beliefs about the nature of personal identity, and in ideas about what aspects of identity are appropriate or susceptible to portrayal" (Woodall, 1997, p. 9). An example is the dualist concept of identity which makes a distinction between identity and the material body.⁵ Identity could then be defined in terms of the soul, virtue, genius, character, personality, or subjectivity. By these terms an accurate likeness is unable to satisfactorily represent the identity of the sitter. Instead "bodily resemblance comes to seem a barrier to union with the sitter, rather than the means whereby it can be achieved" (Woodall, 1997, p. 9).

The difficulty with identity types is the discontinuity between an identity assumed by an individual to locate themselves within a social role, and the private being which this

⁵ The formulation of dualism is credited to French philosopher Rene Descartes who proposed that personal identity was a concept of the mind or thinking self (Woodall, 1997, p. 10).

identity conceals. Brilliant gives the example of personal identity for which representation can be established through conventional visual devices, fleshed out by the idiosyncrasies of face and physique, and itemized by name. Brilliant suggests that there would be very little that was personal about such a construction of identity. A portrait conceived in such typical terms would give meaning "only by reference to the broadest social context and bound to the typecasting generalities that pertain to that context" (Brilliant, 1991, p. 12). Gage (1997, p. 128) corroborates this notion by suggesting that a person's representation may help to identify, however, the surface features of the portrait will throw little light on their identity.

How ever identity is defined, when it is opposed to the body there will be problems concerning how the portrayed body can represent the subject's identity. The visual resemblance between the image and the material body of the portrayed becomes separable from the resemblance between the image and the sitter's inner identity. An increasing dualist perspective on portraiture "is the main reason why likeness became such a contentious issue from the late eighteenth century" (Woodall, 1997, p. 10).

Subjectivity

The uniqueness of the individual and his or her accomplishments are central to the portrait genre in western culture. Van Alphen attributes the regard in which the portrait is held in this culture to its double measure of originality. The artist's faithful representation of a person's external appearance (the sitter as object) is supposed to guarantee what that person is like internally (the sitter as subject). In this case the viewer is privy to the 'original' and 'unique' subjectivity of both the portrayer and the portrayed (Van Alphen, 1997, p. 239). Identifying the genre in this way foregrounds aspects of the portrait that depend on ideas about the human subject which suggest that "subjectivity can be equated with notions like the self and individuality" (Van Alphen, 1997, p. 239).

Van Alphen (1997, p. 239) argues that when a person's subjectivity is defined in terms of its uniqueness rather than its social connections, "it is someone's interior essence rather than a moment of short duration in a differential process" that becomes the portrait's focus. Given such an emphasis, a person's continuity or discontinuity with others is denied in order to present the subject as personality (Van Alphen, 1997, p. 239).

This being the case, does such an approach limit a portrait's potential, or does Van Alphen's argument suggest that for portraiture a wider expression of subjectivity is possible?

Buchloh thinks not. Discussing the continual renewal of the genre in the face of the disappearance of other traditional pictorial categories such as the nude, the still life, and the landscape, Buchloh is sceptical of portraiture's survival due to the precarious condition of subjectivity in modern times. Since the reliance on mimetic resemblance between object and representation collapsed after Cubism,⁶ Buchloh (1998, p. 151) believes the portrait's continual resurrection occurs because it is a site where "the myth of a foundational subjectivity would be most avidly reaffirmed within every generation of twentieth century modernity."

It was in fact at the same time as the Cubist movement that German photographer August Sander⁷ began his project to document all the professions and trades of the Weimar Republic. Sander presented his subjects as having been established within social relations and determined by their professional identity, a condition which Buchloh (1998, p. 154) sees as affirming "foundational concepts of subjectivity as grounded in nature and religion, in the solid determinations of class, ethnicity and race." However at a time when structural and psychoanalytic models of subjectivity were first being articulated, Buchloh (1998, p. 154) suggests that Sander's project merely becomes evidence of the loss of an earlier concept of subjectivity. This is a situation which Buchloh (1998) believes:

would inevitably become ever more tenuous with each attempt to rescue the vanishing categories and conventions of subject depiction by photographic or painterly means in the face of rapidly and dramatically increasing evidence of the destruction of all remnants of the model of an autonomous and self-determining subjectivity in the present. (p. 155)

In opposition to Sander's approach was American photographer Paul Strand's project in 1917 in which a hidden camera was used to record anonymous figures in the street. In this scenario the portraitist's familiarization with the sitter, in order to harmonize the sitter's physiognomic appearance with their psychological complexity, does not take place (Buchloh, 1998, p. 155). It is superseded by a randomly executed

⁶ Picasso's cubist paintings of Kahnweiler, Vollard, and Uhde in 1910 disassembled portraiture by displacing physiognomic resemblance in the sitter's pictorial representations (Buchloh, 1998, p. 150).

⁷ See Image B, p. 75.

snapshot, relegating the portrait session to "an assault where the photographer robs the subject of its momentarily distracted physiognomic appearance in the service of a higher degree of authenticity" (Buchloh, 1998, p. 155). In postwar portraits, photographers such as Richard Avedon⁸ deleted the subject from public urban spaces of sociality so that the condition of portraiture came to be about spatial isolation as well as social fragmentation. Avedon's formula was more like an assault on the anonymous subject in terms of an intrusion into what Buchloh (1998, p. 155) describes as "the privacy of an alienated existence, the space of the hidden victim." The condition which positions the sitter as victim or spectacularized substitute is, Buchloh (1998, p. 155) argues, the result of either a desperate genre which has to haunt its subjects in order to survive, or a genre which can only gain access to the subject as victim because "these are the solely evident states of the current formation of subjecthood."

In modern consumer society, Buchloh (1998, p. 156) believes that subjectivity is established through the production and exchange of signs, which is reason enough "to discredit if not render obscene any claim to represent individual subjectivity as a physiognomic phenomenon solely by photographic means." While photographers were attempting to keep the portrait genre alive, artists in the 1960's were struggling to unravel it once and for all. Working in the areas of Conceptual Art and Pop Art, artists used various strategies to upset traditional representations of figures and faces. Artists such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein appropriated imagery from the media and mass culture, a strategy which came to articulate the absence of subjectivity, leaving the genre "not only emptied of all individuality of painterly performance but of any remnants of interiority and privacy of the self as sitter" (Buchloh, 1998, p. 158).

While each generation develops strategies to challenge established modes of art practice, younger generations respond by developing counter strategies. As Buchloh (1998, p. 159) points out, rather than being merely reactionary, these strategies "will often deny the radical implications of the work of their predecessors, perhaps in favour of a more conciliatory approach to the continuing viability of the genre." Such a reaction occurred in response to the undermining of portraiture by Conceptual Art and Pop Art with the rise of various photographic practices in the 1980's such as those of Nan Goldin, Richard Billingham, Thomas Ruff and Thomas Struth. This heralded the re-emergence of photographic skills and techniques in defence of the portrait genre so that

⁸ See Image D, p. 77.

once again "we witness the rise of portraiture and the refiguration of individual subjectivity" (Buchloh, 1998, p. 159).

Realism

The Realism movement was dominant in Britain and France from about 1840 to 1880. Industrial and political revolutions caused rapid social change which Nochlin (cited in Wells, 1997, p. 205) suggests inspired artists to explore everyday social experience. Photography became implicated in Realism initially as an aid to painting, and then as a means to represent visual reality. Photography's role in realism was to relate the truth, however photographs were not only perceived as telling the truth, but also "as being a part of it, physical traces of passing moments" (Green-Lewis, 1996, p. 5). In this way "a photograph participates in its subject matter through an indexical as well as iconic relation" (Green-Lewis, 1996, p. 25).⁹

Green-Lewis (1996, p. 25) describes how the limited interpretive space between the image - the physical trace - and the material object lessens the doubt of the representation's truthfulness. At the time, however, Nochlin (cited in Wells, 1997, p. 205) believes that the issue was confused by the assertion that photographers were doing little more than mirroring everyday reality. This supposes that their perception was unaffected by other factors, as evident in Fox Talbot's idea that the photograph is formed by optical and chemical means alone, without the aid of someone knowledgeable in the art of drawing. Green-Lewis (1996, p. 59) suggests that such a view contains "both the limitations and the locus of photography's power." However this negates the human element which Ruskin (cited in Green-Lewis, 1996, p. 59) praised when he claimed that "art is valuable or otherwise, only as it expresses the personality, activity, and living perception of a good and great human soul."

Barthes (cited in Tagg, 1988, p. 1) describes his realist position by drawing a connection between "the necessarily real thing which has been placed before the lens" and the photographic image which is "somehow co-natural with its referent." The photograph asserts the overwhelming truth that "the thing has been there," though it is "a reality one can no longer touch" (Barthes cited in Tagg, 1988, p. 1). For Barthes,

⁹ Indexical and iconic signs were defined by C.S. Pierce, an American semiotician. An indexical sign is based on cause and effect, such as a footprint which indicates or traces a recent presence. An iconic sign is based on resemblance (Wells, 1997, p. 294).

(cited in Batchen, 1999, p. 14) the reality of the photograph is not one of truth-to-appearance, but of truth-to-presence, a matter of being (of something's irrefutable place in time) rather than resemblance.

It is important to take into account the nature of photographic production when considering its relationship with realism. Throughout the process there exists a variety of subtle manipulations whereby "every photograph is the result of specific and, in every sense, significant distortions which render its relation to any prior reality deeply problematic" (Tagg, 1988, p. 2). Describing the construction of the photograph, Slater (1997, p. 93) points out how a multitude of different meanings are created with every variation of angle, lens, perspective, caption, context, and audience. The particular set of meanings which might be called 'realistic' are only labelled thus because they satisfy conventions which denote 'realism.' Slater (1997, p. 93) argues that "the 'knowledge' they contain is a system of meanings within representation, not the truth offered up by the object."

Opposed to a literal interpretation of reality, which must contend with anomalies borne out of the photographic process, there exists an alternative vocabulary most associated with 'art photography.' This concept prefers 'expressionist' over 'straight' realism and 'essence' over 'appearance' by conceiving realism as "a reconstruction of appearances which penetrates the 'mere surface' of things" (McQuire, 1998, p. 16). In this context the creative eye of the photographer, via the camera, is mythologized as the source which allows us to see what we would otherwise not see (Clarke, 1997, p. 20). So instead of the photograph only being able to reflect the superficial aspect of things, this perspective foregrounds the notion of insight over sight. A language of depth replaces that of surface so that "the photographer, like the poet, 'sees into the life of things'" (Clarke, 1997, p. 21).

This concept of reality as depth and substance as opposed to superficiality and surface is complicated by the nature of the photographic moment. The photograph fixes a moment in time, a moment which has historically been reduced from hours to fractions of a second. Early daguerreotypes, due to their long exposure times, enforced a formality on sitters which prevented any attempt to probe or suggest personality. Faster shutter speeds quickly overcame this handicap and reinforced the mythology of the photographs 'truthfulness,' as it is the 'true' record of what happened at that moment (Clarke, 1997,

p. 24). However, regardless of the importance accorded to the photographic moment, in hindsight it will always be seen as a historical record which has stopped time and taken its subject out of history. In this sense every photograph "has no before or after: it represents only the moment of its own making" (Clarke, 1997, p. 24).

Contemporary Concerns

Contradictions in the nature and definition of portraiture have provided contemporary artists with space in which to challenge and broaden portraiture's range. For example, artists have questioned some of the issues previously discussed by "undermining conventional notions of the portrait as mere likeness, as revelatory truth, emphasising the portrait as object, as surface, and as performance" (De Salvo, 1995, p. 57). Some artists who have had an impact in these areas include Chuck Close, whose minimalist investigations have little to do with reproducing likeness or illuminating a subjects 'truth,' but instead experiment with scale and the process of painting. Hannah Wilke chose performance to explore the relationship between self and audience, while Cindy Sherman used the portrait "to challenge basic assumptions of authenticity, truth, and authorship" (De Salvo, 1995, p. 22). For some artists, the portrait has become a form against which issues of identity, such as race and sexuality, are defined, while others use the genre to expose the boundaries between private self and public life (De Salvo, 1995, p. 22).

In reviewing contemporary portrait practice, Kuspit (1989, p. 51) believes artists are deconstructing the everyday sense of the subject as a clear and distinct, readable surface phenomena. Artists may choose to "create a condition of . . . uncertain readability in order to generate a sense of depth" (Kuspit, 1989, p. 51). For example, a familiar formal convention is to portray people alone, however, another reading may be emphasized to suggest peculiarity or isolation (Kuspit, 1989, p. 51). An example of the difficulty in comprehending a portrait subject's inner life is explored by artist Nancy Burson through computer-manipulated images. By portraying a false emotion of surprise or horror, Burson creates a non-person, "an illusion, whose uncanny appearance suggests a mysterious inner life" (Kuspit, 1989, p. 49).¹⁰ But even after suspending our disbelief and projecting our own inner life onto the fictional figure, we

¹⁰ See Image G, p. 80.

cannot specify this inner life for "we do not know how authentically self-aware a 'person' it is" (Kuspit, 1989, p. 49).

Intimacy

Despite debates which undermine the relevance and ability of photographic portraiture in representing inner character or 'soul,' the desire to attempt it by various means persists. Such a view is held by Brilliant (1991, p. 12) who believes it is possible for artists whose portraits "contain something more than the eternality of appearance and the banality of social effect." In such cases a successful portrait, which effectively expresses something of the subject, is reliant on the ability of the artist to perceive the peculiarities of appearance and character in a way that is accessible and satisfactory to viewers (Brilliant, 1991, p. 14).

In this kind of portraiture the photographer brings an intimate sensibility to their relationship with the subject, and an awareness of the subject's performance during the portrait act. Portraiture is a ritual encounter which is both trusting and wary; "the subject submits to the artist's interpretation while hoping to retain some control over what that interpretation will be" (Rosenberg cited in Brilliant, 1991, p. 90). Brilliant (1991, p. 90) adds that the artist may also fabricate an identity for the subject which may vary from the subject's representation of self at the time of portrayal.

Richard Avedon's portrait practice is an example of this approach. He chooses to make his portraits in the studio where he finds that sitters become symbols of their own selves when isolated from their environment. Avedon (cited in Weiermair, 1994) is quoted as saying:

people come to me to be photographed much as they would go to the doctor or to a fortune teller - to find out something about the way they feel . . . there is a moment of great intimacy between us. But it is not an earned intimacy. It has no past and no future. (p. 10)

Portraiture of this type incorporates two points of view, the artist's and the subject's, and it relies upon tension between these two views to achieve a satisfactory outcome.

But what are our expectations of such a collaboration? In accepting that people aren't integrated, homogenous beings with a fixed array of traits, but instead are

"eruptive and conflicted," Kozloff (1994, p. 4) admits that "it is to ask too much of a still portrait photograph, a scanty object, to uncover any of this human process . . . yet this is what we do." Similarly, in regard to photographs of himself, Barthes speaks of a desire that such images should always coincide with his profound 'self.' However, he finds the contrary to be the case: "'myself' never coincides with my image; for it is the image which is heavy, motionless, stubborn . . . and 'myself' which is light, divided, dispersed" (Barthes, 1981, p. 12).

For Kozloff, a portrait photograph provides an intimate visual access to the subject for future memory and appraisal. When sitters consent to be photographed they become preoccupied with the thought of being appraised, and what we view in their portrait is how they coped with that thought (Kozloff, 1994, p. 5). However, as Kozloff (1994, p. 5) points out, each one of them "remains unknowable within the pictorial constraints - because character, identity, personal reflex, and history, utterance, and style . . . quite obviously cannot be grasped from a visual icon." The subject seems to be looking out of the portrait but fails to perceive the viewer. Kozloff (1994, p. 5) proposes that some photographers use the theme of personal revelation as a way of compensating for this lack of interactivity. Photographers who work in this way can be roughly divided into two modes of practice, these being formal or informal portraiture. The informal mode is a loose category which may include terms like 'personal' photography, 'insider' documentary and 'subcultural' photography, where photographers work within their social milieu in the hope of obtaining "unmediated insights behind the mask of self-consciousness into unguarded, intimate states of being" (Kozloff, 1994, p. 41).

An example of an informal approach is the work of Nan Goldin whose images, published as *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, collectively form a diaristic account of the everyday relationships between herself and her companions.¹¹ The aim of her work is to achieve an intimacy of disclosure and penetration, to get closer to people, and to see, in a limited way, "how it is with them" (Kozloff, 1994, p. 89). Goldin attempts to gain credibility by immersing herself into the behaviour which appears to be happening spontaneously around her. If the people in Goldin's photographs are acting out their own neuroses, we're persuaded they are real events and that the photographer was involved not only as an observer but, importantly, also as a participant (Kozloff, 1994, p. 102). While Kozloff (1994, p. 109) questions the "act of coarse self-exploitation, which

¹¹ See Image E, p. 78.

devalues privacy and personal dignity in the name of artistic license," he admits to being moved by the images because the people in them are depicted as being "far more dramatically themselves" (Kozloff, 1994, p. 111).

In contrast to Kozloff's viewpoint, Kotz sees Goldin's photographs as voyeuristic, both in terms of Goldin's own voyeurism and that of the viewer. Kotz (1998, p. 207) argues that, "presented under the guise of an 'intimate' relationship between artist and subject, these images relegitimize the codes and conventions of social documentary," a photographic genre with its own "histories of social surveillance and coercion." As Kotz (1998, p. 208) points out, social documentary has always relied upon the transgressive pleasures of looking at different social groups, especially those down the social scale. In the past, pervasive looking at the lives of the poor and disempowered has been legitimized in the name of social philanthropy or government aid, as in the work of the Farm Security Administration in the 1930's.¹² More recently it has been the camera itself which has provided the license to look, as noted previously in the work of Richard Avedon.

This ubiquitous kind of social voyeurism has given rise to a range of new photographic subjects, while creating conditions for the emergence of new 'insider' documentary practices like Goldin's (Kotz, 1998, p. 208). Kotz (1998, p. 208) suggests that this strategy, where the photographer belongs to the group being surveilled, "allows us greater access, and, as insiders, the photographer's voyeurism authorizes our own." However Kotz questions the process which leads to such an outcome. The 'ethics' of this style of documentary demands that the transaction between artist and subject be represented as an *exchange*: the photographer, in return for the photograph taken, "must endeavour to provide political or reformist help, confer 'truth', 'dignity', or 'humanity' upon the subjects, or at the very least, give them a print" (Kotz, 1998, p. 208). Kotz (1998, p. 208) is therefore mindful of Goldin's claims of intimacy and honesty, as, despite the spontaneous performance before the camera, the photographic language used has a "history and an inscribed structure of power relations that cannot be easily evaded."

¹² The Farm Security Administration was a government agency established in the USA in 1935. The function of the photography section headed by Roy Stryker was to provide images to accompany official reports detailing conditions in agriculture (Price, 1997, p. 81).

One of Goldin's contemporaries is photographer Jack Pierson, whose concerns are derived from a similar social practice, although his approach tends to highlight Goldin's relative adherence to the conventions of the social documentary mode.¹³ Pierson's photographs resemble pre-existing cultural documents and motifs, imitating the sumptuousness and sophistication of fashion and advertising imagery. In doing so, Pierson counteracts the legitimating values of subcultural documentary, like 'immediacy,' 'honesty,' and 'intimacy,' which Kotz (1998, p. 210) believes can be understood as "effects of photographic codes, rather than as spontaneous intersubjective performances communicated neutrally via the camera."

Where Goldin's photographs rely on their captions and the identity of the subject, Pierson's images operate as pure appearance, containing no real sociological content, no illusion of transparency associated with social documentary, and no "expectation that one can learn something about others through photography" (Kotz, 1998, p. 209). In comparing these two artists, Kotz hopes to emphasize the difference in the promotion of Goldin's work as 'chance documentary effect' in comparison with Pierson's fully aestheticized practice. By extending the exploration of subjectivity and self-portraiture through the use of existing genres and images, Pierson hopes to reveal how "subjectivity itself is propped up on an amalgam of desired images" (Kotz, 1998, p. 210). In so doing Kotz believes we have all seen these images before, "yet they still have a certain power to move us, to elicit fantasy and identification" (Kotz, 1998, p. 210).

Context

Throughout photography's history the ways in which photographs are used, ideas about their ownership and copyright, and the contexts in which they are ordered, have all had to be negotiated. Tagg (cited in Lister, 1995, p. 14) argues that it was never self-evident that a photographic image was more truthful than any other kind of image, or that a machine produced image could be owned by an individual or have an author. Lister (1995, p. 14) reasserts that these values became established by appealing to other sources of power and authority, and connecting the photograph to them. In terms of it being a work of art, the photograph has been aligned with "traditional ideas about artistic creation where the artist is thought to have 'given' something of 'themselves' to their work" (Lister, 1995, p. 14). For Lister (1995, p. 14), 'the facts' presented in a

¹³See Image J, p. 83.

photograph are 'guaranteed' by the extent in which he accepts the principles of empirical scientific method, but to read a photograph as "the 'subjective expression' of an artist's idiosyncratic way of seeing the world" depends on his "having the idea that this is what art and artists do (and that it is appropriate to see a photograph in this way)" (Lister, 1995, p. 14).

One determinant of the way in which photographs are understood is the context in which they are viewed. Price and Wells (1997, p. 34) suggest that photographs are "weak at the level of imminent meaning and depend for their decoding on text, surrounding, organization and so on." Photographs do not contain a single, intrinsic meaning, but rather rely on many contextual clues which lie outside the photograph itself. Price and Wells (1997, p. 34) suggest it is key institutions which provide the photograph's context by indicating social meanings, designing them into a space, and supplying accompanying text, which gives a preferred reading and allows sense to be made of otherwise ambiguous images.

Regardless of institutional context, the photograph still carries with it many complexities in regard to the way in which it is read. McQuire (1998, p. 47) raises this issue when he claims that the desire to append a name, a text, a context to the image in order to give an explanation of what is already there, "reveals the thorns of doubt embedded in the positivist evaluation of photography."¹⁴ In the sense that the photograph is the essence of natural language, McQuire (1998, p. 47) suggests that there remains a mistrust of the visual, not because of the camera's veracity, but that it gives too much veracity, or that the "weight of information lacks order, direction, focus." Viewers with magnifying glasses pored over the first daguerreotypes for hours, fascinated at a level of detail previously unimagined. Yet while the flatness of the surface seemed to cultivate photographic meaning, close scrutiny failed to distil a more precise meaning. McQuire (1998) considers that:

difficulty in defining the significance of a particular image from within (perhaps a face; but whose, where, when?) dictates the importance of the series of hermeneutic frames, ranging from the caption to the establishment of generic boundaries and distinct avenues of publication and display, which have developed as means of regulating photographic meaning. (p. 47)

¹⁴ The theory of Positivism, which developed around the same time as photography, centred around the belief that "observable quantifiable facts, recorded by scientists and experts, would one day offer man such a total knowledge about nature and society that he would be able to order them both" (Berger & Mohr, 1982, p. 99).

The promotion of insider documentary photography is an example of how individual practices can be formed into a homogeneous grouping to advance a photographic language, or style. Artists such as Nan Goldin, Jack Pierson, and Richard Billingham have all recently published coffee-table books which are lushly produced and commercially circulated, leading to a wider public awareness of their work's visual language. This 'look' is then easily disseminated, via stylistic derivatives, into other areas of culture such as fashion and advertising (Kotz, 1998, p. 205). However, a difficulty with this contextual positioning is noted by Kotz (1998, p. 207) who believes that while the work of these artists allows the viewer to feel like an 'insider' partaking in an intimate experience, when the same images are reproduced too many times and liked the same way by too many people, this intimacy is compromised. In such a scenario Kotz (1998, p. 207) believes that "if we all feel the same sentimental rush before the same image, it ceases to be poignant, and instead becomes trite, coded, formulaic: an index of bland liberal humanism rather than acute social difference."

Challenging the Portrait's Authority

It is the enquiry into accepted notions of authenticity and identity which encourages the questioning of the authority of portraiture. Historically, the concept of 'authenticity' was developed "in order to preserve the authority of the portrayed image as truth and exemplar within . . . industrial society" (Woodall, 1997, p. 21). Woodall describes how the 'authentic' portrait at this time needed to faithfully represent the sitter for later consideration by the viewer. From the need for historical accuracy, the portrait soon developed into an image where pictorial characteristics were identified with the personality of the sitter. Authentic portraits then came to be understood to offer "a direct confrontation with individual identity" which "revealed truth about the sitter's personality" (Woodall, 1997, p. 22).

Woodall (1997, p. 21) suggests that belief in identity as a static, recognizable, and eternal truth unique to the depicted body has been crucial to portraiture's claim to immortalize. However, identity has come to be defined as an interactive process between the sitter and the portraitist rather than a revelatory encounter. As Woodall (1997, p. 21) explains, the sitter is not the passive object of the artist's subjectivity, instead the portrait involves a "perpetual oscillation between artist and sitter, observer and observed."

5. Examples of Contemporary Practice

This chapter will compare the work of four contemporary photographers through an investigation of the critical discourse in which their work exists. The intention is to take a small sample of late twentieth century portrait practice and investigate how individual artists are negotiating some of the complexities that the genre presents. Artists featured include German photographers Thomas Ruff and Thomas Struth, both of whom reveal a strong conceptual background and a highly intellectual approach to portraiture. In contrast to their approach is the work of young British photographer Richard Billingham and American documentarist Nan Goldin, both of whom present a more subjective, diaristic account of lived experience. The different methods and motivations employed by these artists in the creation of their work will give some indication of the limits imposed by traditional forms of portraiture, or the ways in which such restrictions are used to make portraits newly meaningful.

Some of the issues which arise from the work of these artists include the questioning of straight portraiture and its concentration on individualism and personality. This theme is more likely to be approached through the exploration of components of social identity such as the photographer's or the subject's inter-relationship with family and society. Also of interest in contemporary portraiture is a tendency which emphasizes the person of the photographer over the subject of the photograph. This is particularly noticeable in Billingham's treatment and representation of his subjects, compared to the restraint shown by Struth. Billingham's spontaneous, unstaged images are in stark contrast to Struth's practice which reflect both a strategic wisdom and a certain old-fashioned courtesy. Both approaches raise important questions about the relationship between content and form. As Kostelanetz (cited in Coleman, 1998, p. 108) points out, new contents may be better handled with older forms "precisely because unfamiliar experiences are more easily understood and communicated in familiar formats."

Birmingham's and Goldin's photographs occupy a space somewhere between portraiture, social documentary and photojournalism, the roots of which can be traced back to the 1920's. During this period photographic style and usage was significantly effected by the emergence of photographic reportage. This was a form which evoked reactions through the sequential arrangement of images, the addition of captions for

incidental information, an accompanying essay, and later the use of colour photography (Rosenblum, 1996, p. 677).

It was also during the 1920's and 30's that social documentation came to be seen as a distinct category. After the work of Lewis Hine and the Farm Security Administration in America, and August Sander's study of German society, social documentation became a means of providing a 'truthful' depiction of circumstances. Such documentation usually took the form of photojournalism or "politically engaged projects that sought to present working-class culture from the point of view of its members" (Rosenblum, 1996, p. 674). There was some hostility toward early portraiture's 'democratizing potential,' as it was feared that photography "could destroy social difference between sitters" (Green-Lewis, 1996, p. 53). Not only were these fears unfounded but perhaps the opposite is true; social difference became a voyeuristic pleasure particularly for the higher classes.

Nan Goldin

New York photographer Nan Goldin's addiction to the photodocumentation of her life resulted in the publication of *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, a compendium of the domestic bad news in her life up until that time. Goldin's compulsion rested with the way in which she desired to experience and remember her intimate relationships; "the instant of photographing, instead of creating distance, is a moment of clarity and emotional connection for me" (Goldin, 1996, p. 6).¹⁵ Unlike her written diary, Goldin chose to make her visual diary public, which for her is equivalent to publicizing the family album. This is confirmed by Kozloff (1994, p. 106) who acknowledges that the "diffuse history of socially marginal or outcast figures is substituted for that of the photographer's relatives."

Family snapshots taken for the family album are, as advertising reinforces, usually pictures which record 'happy memories,' not messy reality. Holland (1997, p. 137) is not surprised that "family collections include annual pictures of Christmas dinners and birthday teas, but hardly any of the daily meal . . . crying, bullying or sulky children are definitely not for posterity." This is not so in Goldin's case however, where snapshots of similar naughty behaviour are included in an upending of family album conventions.

¹⁵See Image E, p. 78.

Kozloff (1994, p. 103) suggests that through these images "we are given immediate access to what are usually off-limits episodes and embarrassing rows." Goldin (1996, p. 145) confirms this when she speaks of her intention: "I wanted to make the record of my life that nobody could revise: not a safe, clean version, but instead, a record of what things really looked like and felt like."

Goldin communicates her reality of lived experience through the use of a certain type of photographic style. This kind of photography is characterized by "gritty, quasi-documentary colour images of individuals, families, or groupings, presented in an apparently intimate, unposed manner, shot in an off-kilter, snapshot style, often a bit grainy, unfocused, or off-colour" (Kotz, 1998, p. 204). Other common characteristics are; content, which usually depicts 'marginal' subjects from 'outside' mainstream representation or dominant culture; and bias, such that the photographer is usually part of the social milieu being photographed (Kotz, 1998, p. 204).

The aesthetics of intimacy are signified through the use of visual codes. As Blazwick (1998, p. 7) explains, the "unforgiving mechanics of the tripod are replaced by the fallible, desiring body. Constructed tableaux are rejected for a truth located in the artless, the unstaged, the semi-conscious." Photographs of lives lived at the blurry edges between adolescence and adulthood, sobriety and intoxication, are given "a sense of intimacy, signified by 'poor' technique" (Blazwick, 1998, p. 7). It is this quality that Blazwick believes defines these images as portraiture rather than documentary. In order for Goldin to share the universal concerns of her intimate portrait moments, they are monumentalized into images which become "photographs that are no longer consigned to the photo album or dresser drawer but publicly disseminated through mass reproduction or museum exhibition" (Kotz, 1998, p. 209).

Richard Billingham

Writing of the working class's use of domestic photography in the early twentieth century, Holland reveals that the poorer the community the less directly are their daily activities reflected in their pictures. They were more likely to record "the formality and dignity of their life, not its more distressing moments" (Holland, 1997, p. 131). This is not the case, however, for photographic artists of the 1990's. Billingham's portraits are

of his immediate family who live in an urban council flat in England.¹⁶ His photographs centre around an alcoholic father and a chain-smoking mother who are both depicted "in economic, emotional, physical disarray, perpetually on the verge of exploding into chaos" (Williams, 1997, p. 21).

As in Goldin's case, Williams suggests that Billingham's proximity to the situation saves the work from being voyeuristic. However, in the same article Williams (1997, p. 21) acknowledges the camera's intrusion into scenes of family life that normally would be left "mercifully unrecorded." The depiction of the sitter as victim leaves Billingham's work open to critics who see such material as exploiting certain groups of people; "serving up the poor as exotic fare for voyeuristic consumers" (Rogers cited in Wells, 1997, p. 230). In his defence of such claims Billingham (cited in Williams, 1997, p. 23) states that it is not his intention to sensationalize or politicize, "only to make work that is as spiritually meaningful as I can make it."

The unsparing representation of his personal life through images of his family's domestic squalor make it difficult for Billingham's practice to support such a claim. Writing on an exhibition of Billingham's photographs in Birmingham in 2000, Home (2000, p. 45) suggests they lack any spiritual substance and suffer from indeterminacy due to a "woefully under theorised and blatantly ideological working practice." Production of work which propounds the notion that there is wisdom in accepting or enduring poverty has long been a means of social advancement for bourgeois writers and artists from lower class backgrounds (Home, 2000, p. 46). In questioning arguments that deny the work's voyeuristic, sensational, and political nature, Home (2000, p. 45) wonders why Billingham's parents "are apparently quite happy to let their son make a living by flogging mediocre images of their private life to bourgeois aesthetes who find this type of representation titillating."

Billingham, Goldin, and others have often portrayed people who are in some way in extremis: drunk, violent, or ecstatic. Blazwick (1998, p. 9) puts forward the view that these "unmediated insights behind the mask of self-consciousness" capture "unguarded, intimate states of being." Commenting on this style of photography, Charlesworth (2001, p. 3) suggests there is currently a strong belief in "the photograph's potential and in its privileged access to the real." Yet it seems the reality

¹⁶See Image I, p. 82.

being offered is limited. Charlesworth (2000, p. 3) notes how the autobiographical documentary mode is favoured for its authenticity, however, this results in artists rarely venturing past their immediate surroundings. It is also a common feature for this kind of photography to define that which is most real as being that which is most excessive (Charlesworth, 2001, p. 3).

Thomas Ruff

The portraiture of Thomas Ruff and Thomas Struth is the antithesis of the work mentioned above. Both attended the Dusseldorf Art Academy where they were taught by influential photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher. The Bechers are renowned for their methodical cataloguing of industrial structures, characterized by photographic precision, systematic composition, consistent visual appearance, and an overriding conceptual framework. It is hardly surprising, then, that Ruff's photographs "give a uniform clarity, an unsparing, impassive and technically perfect objectivity to the surface of . . . a sitter's face" (Blazwick, 1998, p. 7).¹⁷

The impact of the Bechers' work can be seen in Ruff's systematic method and conceptual style. Friends and acquaintances of approximate age to the artist are generally photographed in the full-frontal pose, like "plaster busts" (Humeltenberg, 1992, p. 101). Faces are frontally lit with a lack of lighting effects, giving a stark consistency reminiscent of passport photographs. The individuals portrayed show no emotion, as they are directed by Ruff not to laugh or smile (Herzog, 1999, p. 30). The only other manipulations are the tight cropping of the final prints which are then greatly enlarged, sometimes up to ten feet tall, so that "every facial blemish and dermatological flaw is clearly revealed" (Kaufhold, 1991, p. 64).

On first encounter Ruff's portraits can provoke irritation. Following the conventions of photo-booth imagery and exaggerated in scale, it is as if they are teasing the viewer into discovering something about the subject writ so large before them. The temptation to see the portraits as offering a 'window to the soul' is difficult to dismiss, especially when the facial topography of Ruff's sitters are rendered in such minute detail. In the same moment, this notion is denied by the image's failure to provide visual

¹⁷See Image F, p. 79.

cues, such as shadows, gesture, expression, and context, that would normally facilitate the desire to reach a more intimate understanding of the portrait's subject.

Responding to a perceived detachment from his surroundings and his own history, Ruff displays influences of the visual training acquired early in his career (Herzog, 1999, p. 28). This can be seen in his portrait practice which eschews any reference to the anecdotal, the narrative, or the identity of the individual (Pohlmann, 1999, p. 190). Lacking a concern for psychological empathy, Ruff approaches the subject with a scientific neutrality: "I wanted the sharpest focus that's possible in photography. So I chose a camera, lens, lighting and film that best suited the criteria of sharpness and neutrality" (Herzog, 1999, p. 30). The result is an objectivity which causes the portraits to "radiate a certain coldness owing to the precise readability of every detail" (Pohlmann, 1999, p. 190).

The monumental scale of these portraits leaves the depicted faces exposed, so much so that Humeltenberg (1992, p. 101) believes their gaze passes over the viewer into an empty zone, lending them a sense of detachment. Ruff's surface objectivity conveys an "inaccessibility so that the viewer's attempt to probe the portraits bounces off the subject's skin" (Humeltenberg, 1992, p. 101). Sobieszek (1999, p. 167) sees the enlargement of the face to such great sizes as making it "progressively more difficult either to project any sense of subjectivity onto something this vast, or to see any of our dreams or desires reflected from such facial panoramas."

Documentary style images such as those by Billingham hope to have some sort of connection with their audience via an "assumption that the inner reality of the subject can be made manifest visually through gesture and expression" (Charlesworth, 2001, p. 4). In contrast, Ruff's portraits deny any such connection. Musgrave (1997, p. 37) suggests they are non-portraits that suppress difference and promote sameness. The control and uniformity of Ruff's process serve to foreground the "idiosyncrasies of appearance that traditionally suggest something of the subject's interior" but which become "significant only as external variations" (Musgrave, 1997, p. 37).

These portraits do not invite a subjective reading, rather they are investigations into the nature of photographic reality. Ruff (cited in Sobieszek, 1999, p. 165) explains that his images "are not images of reality, but show a kind of second reality, the image of the

image." According to Krauss (1999, p. 174), narrow social functions limit the photographic practice of amateur photographers, resulting in a stereotyping of their subjects and the way they render them. The subject becomes limited and repetitive and its disposition equally so, such that "frontality and centering, with their banishing of all signs of temporality or contingency, are the formal norms" (Krauss, 1999, p. 174). This is the very basis for Ruff's photographs which are intended to be "an imitation of the conventional," a part of his "contemporary representation of humankind" (Ruff cited in Humeltenberg, 1992, p. 101).

Thomas Struth

Thomas Struth's photographic output displays the influences he inherited from the early teaching of Bernd and Hilla Becher that he shared with Ruff. Struth's practice, like Ruff's, combines a rigorous conceptual attitude with a neutral, objective vision of reality and a precise technique. One of Struth's ongoing projects is a series of portraits of individuals and groups, particularly families.¹⁸ In this work Tosatto, Visser and Durand (1998, p. 5) suggest that human emotion is implied but never indulged: "It emerges in the psychological density of a gaze, in the singularity of a posture . . . in the knotty relationships of the family portraits." These comments preface a number of issues that act both as an introduction to Struth's practice as well as a contrasting perspective to the work of those artists previously reviewed.

Tosatto (1998, p. 9) describes Struth's portraits as being the result of an 'objective' gaze which "comes across as uncluttered by excessive subjectivism and the affectation of a recurring pictorialism." The concentration on objectivity and optical precision leads to group portraits being aligned with little spatial depth, a consequence that Kaufhold (1991, p. 64) believes "underscores their serious and statuary nature." While Criqui (1998, p. 124) sees Struth's art as being "artless, devoid of any effect, of any technical or expressive preening, or of any subjective or collective claim." Assertions about the effects that Struth's technique produces culminate with Sennett's (1994, p. 91) claim that the photographer is a radical artist who "has freed the . . . people that he photographs from the dialectics of a consumer society." What technical and philosophical position does Struth incorporate into his practice that warrant such claims?

¹⁸ See Image H, p. 81.

Struth's complicated exposures are made using a large, bulky camera in conjunction with a tripod. Two important considerations resulting from this process include the lengthy exposure time and the fact that Struth stands next to the camera to take the shot. These photographic practices revert back to nineteenth century routines when long exposures sometimes necessitated special head rests in order to keep the sitter's posture still. As Clarke (1997, p. 15) notes; "the result was often a stylized series of positions and attitudes in which the *act* of being photographed superseded the experience." In contrast to the painted portrait, use of a camera meant that the lens became the focus of the sitter's gaze whereby the nineteenth century photographer could stand at a distance from the camera and still make the exposure. The portraitist no longer had to look the subject in the eye, thus deflecting the psychological space "from the artist onto the viewer" (Gage, 1997, p. 125). It is these historical aspects of portraiture that have informed Struth's methodology. The intense eye contact that Struth achieves through this process leads Weski (1998, p. 6) to describe the people shown in the portraits as being "serious, candid, in deep concentration."

Struth maintains this intensity in each portrait by adhering to a series of self-imposed conventions. These govern facets of the portrait's construction prior to the final exposure and include; a formality of pose, and a renunciation of spontaneous 'snapshot' effects; a preference for frontality in sitters' poses; a suspension of the sitters' daily activities and routines; group portraits in a frieze-like composition on a plane parallel to the camera; portraits restricted to friends or associates; an avoidance of public space; a close attention to cultural space and the micro-level of individual styles of living (Bryson, 1998, p. 131). Despite the consequent modesty of pose and composition, Visser (1998, p. 19) suggests that the neutrality of Struth's approach results in a balanced combination of analytic power and visual insight which shows us what "photography is still (or again) capable of, in a time overrun by images." In advocating the pleasure of looking, Struth wishes to invite investigation and contemplation. By rejecting the portrait's sentimental role of revealing an interior and enigmatic personality, or inducing psychological revelation, Struth (cited in Sennett, 1994, p. 94) hopes "to give pause, or move to investigate viewing."

Struth's lingering method shows an attentiveness to the subject being depicted. In opposition to the photographic moment he sets coagulated time, and instead of chance he sets structural analysis (Visser, 1998, p. 22). In-depth acquaintance with the people he

photographs, and careful preparations, "point to the desire to make images that are the result of a process, a synthesis of impressions, knowledge, experience and visual capabilities" (Visser, 1998, p. 23). The calmness and simplicity resulting from this process can contain for the viewer a pleasure that comes "within a hair-breadth of ennui," however, it is the apparent insignificance of the portrait content that for Criqui (1998, p. 124) is "the very aspect that makes them precious." Barthes (1993, p. 4) suggests that in the photograph "the event is never transcended for the sake of something else"; likewise in Struth's portraits in which the moment captured is of primary importance.

In the rhetoric of the photographic portrait, "facing the camera signifies solemnity, frankness, the disclosure of the subject's essence" (Sontag, 1978, p. 37). Such is the case for Struth's portraits which, according to Sennett (1994, p. 94), examine an urban and adult theme; "the relationship between people who respect each other's privacy, silences, and difference." The images show strangers whose presence and life is portrayed "without the need to transgress boundaries by demanding intimacy or revelation" (Sennett, 1994, p. 94). In respecting these boundaries Struth's subjects are endowed with a life of their own; an urbanity in which "people guard their separateness even as they present themselves directly to others" (Sennett, 1994, p. 94).

By using some of the more traditional conventions of photographic portraiture, Struth seems to place his practice in opposition to a deconstructed subjectivity as articulated by the preceding conceptualist generation. Buchloh (1998, p. 160) argues that Struth's project may be "an attempt to construct a protective, if not celebratory reservation of residual forms of bourgeois subjectivity." Ethnic groups whose facial features and dress-code differ dramatically from a globalized middle class character, and those whose family structure differs from Westernized standards, or who do not fit into a heterosexual nuclear family formation, fall outside Struth's reach. Buchloh (1998, p. 160) further suggests that Struth's compendium of globalized middle class identities contained in nuclear family units reflect a certain condition of subjecthood. Such a condition appears restricted to those privileged enough to have access to "the proper economic framework and ideological apparatus of subject formation as much as to the proper conventions of representing subjectivity, i.e. to the Western European genre of portraiture offered by the producers of subjectivity's mythical image" (Buchloh, 1998, p. 161).

This subjective ground places Struth's work in opposition to that of Goldin and Billingham, for as Visser (1998, p. 23) accedes, "you ascribe to the photographer an almost old-fashioned quality such as modesty or perhaps even courtesy, that refuses to reduce people to victims or objects of desire." Such a stance releases Struth to photograph in an atmosphere of mutual respect, where those portrayed confide in him "at a moment that unites the manifestation of the personality, self-forgetfulness and mutual intimacy" (Weski, 1998, p. 6). Struth refuses to indulge in the spectacular, avoids monumentalizing the people portrayed, and resists registering spontaneous form and action "in order to recover the sense of objects and people with a life of their own" (Sennett, 1994, p. 98).

In contrast, Goldin's photographs show people in various sexual couplings, conscious states, and emotional crises. Her camera goes with her everywhere, becoming like a bodily appendage, a social accessory: "I photograph directly from life. These pictures come out of relationships, not observation" (Goldin, 1996, p. 6). Unlike the people in Struth's portraits, Goldin's social group seem only to exist as portrayed subjects. This is confirmed by Goldin (cited in Kotz, 1998, p. 208) who recounts that when a friend was asked whether he minded being photographed by her, or if it was an imposition on his privacy, he replied; "No, I feel I'm more myself when Nan's looking at me than I ever am in the rest of my life."

6. Application

In order to situate my own practice within the genre of portrait photography, in relation to conventions and examples previously mentioned, I would like to begin by discussing the photograph's relationship with ambiguity and memory. Berger reminds us how photographs arrest the flow of time in which events photographed once existed. He suggests that photographs are necessarily of the past, thus presenting us with two messages; "a message concerning the event photographed and another concerning a shock of discontinuity" (Berger & Mohr, 1982, p. 86). This discontinuity is what Berger (1982, p. 87) refers to as the "abyss"; that which separates the moment recorded from the present moment of looking at the photograph. Sontag (1978, p. 15) refers to this separation when she writes of photographs as being memento mori: "To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt."

It is this discontinuity which gives rise to the photograph's ambiguity. According to Berger (1982, p. 91), "discontinuity always produces ambiguity" and thus "all photographs are ambiguous" as their continuity has been broken. So in the case of the portrait, it is the continuity of the subject's life story which has been broken as there exists a gap between the moment they were photographed, and the present moment in which that photograph is viewed. Words, as in a title, are often supplied to help alleviate the photograph's ambiguity. Berger (1982, p. 92) suggests that the photograph, "irrefutable as evidence but weak in meaning, is given a meaning by the words Together the two then become very powerful; an open question then becomes fully answered." However, Berger (1982, p. 92) questions this union and proposes that "photographic ambiguity, if recognized and accepted as such, could offer to photography a unique means of expression."

Berger cites issues around subjectivity as influencing the lack of recognition for the photograph's ambiguous qualities. He suggests that personal psychology has replaced philosophy as "an explanation of the world" whereby "each person's experience remains an individual problem" (Berger & Mohr, 1982, p. 100). Berger (1982, p. 100) also believes that the social function of subjectivity has been suppressed, and reiterates Buchloh's position by stating that "all subjectivity is treated as private, and

the only (false) form . . . socially allowed is that of the individual consumer's dream." This suppression of the social function of subjectivity is seen in the use of photographs to tell the 'truth.' Since the photograph is created in a fraction of a second, Berger (1982, p. 100) believes that such an expectation only results in reducing the truth "to the instantaneous," therefore "what a photograph tells about a door . . . belongs to the same order of truth as what it tells about a man weeping." For these reasons Berger (1982, p. 100) believes that it is likely that "the denial of the innate ambiguity of the photograph is closely connected with the denial of the social function of subjectivity."

The image *Cast Away* (1999)¹⁹ depicts a man in a seated position with his arms outstretched above him. He seems to be signalling or waving at someone or something outside the picture frame, however, the title, and the container beside him, are clues that he is fishing. Having just cast his line, the man is frozen in a moment of physical expression in the otherwise gentle activity of fishing from a jetty. While the discontinuity of the photograph, in terms of what Berger referred to as the abyss, can be applied to this image, the disruption of the flow of time is also emphasized by the frame of action which has been immortalized. The instant captured in the photograph is weak in meaning because what went before and what came after that instant are no longer available for us to create a narrative sequence. In this case, however, rather than being seen as a reduction of the truth, the instantaneous is presented as an iconic homage to that moment in which the subject has been stilled. A sports photograph of an athlete, which captures and holds a split second of motion, does not rely on what has just happened, or what will happen next, in order to intrigue. Such an image invites attention because the photographic technology which has made it possible allows for details of gesture and expression, normally inaccessible to the human eye, to be observed. It was the intention that *Cast Away* (1999), and other works in the series, should reflect these visual concerns.²⁰ However, instead of the energetic movement usually favoured by professional sport reportage, these images focus on the vernacular motion typical of domestic and recreational life.

The ambiguous nature of the images, in terms of Berger's concept of discontinuity, are enhanced by a displacement of the subject from its context. Not only is there a disassociation between past and present, but there is also an excision of the figure from

¹⁹ See Image K, p. 84.

²⁰ The five works discussed here are representative of a body of work that was exhibited at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art in July, 2000.

its surroundings. A manual deep-etching technique, a computerized variation of which is commonly found in advertising media, has been used to obliterate nearly all foreground and background information from the visual field. This technique has been used with the intention of accentuating and intensifying subtle movements and gestures, while at the same time allowing space for the viewer's own interpretation of the visual observations and experiences being presented.

Berger notes that photographs are retrospective: "Before a photograph you search for *what was there*" (1982, p. 279). In this respect Berger sees a photograph as being like a memory, although simpler and more limited in range. Both photographs and memories depend on and oppose the passing of time, both preserve moments and are stimulated by the interconnectedness of events, and both seek instants of revelation; "for it is only such instants which give full reason to their own capacity to withstand the flow of time" (Berger & Mohr, 1982, p. 280). Sontag (1978, p. 11) takes a more pessimistic view of the photograph's relationship with memory by suggesting that taking photographs sets up "a chronic voyeuristic relation to the world which levels the meaning of all events." She continues by observing that after the event has ended, the picture still exists, "conferring on the event a kind of immortality (and importance) it would never otherwise have enjoyed" (Sontag, 1978, p. 11). Discussing Sontag's position, McQuire (1998, p. 128) believes that "by removing a discrete moment from the temporal continuum" Sontag is suggesting that photographs constitute, at best, "an unreliable or false support for memory" and at worst, not a memory aid at all, but an invention or replacement of it.

One distinct disadvantage of memory, unlike the photographic object/document, is that it is subject to a certain transience, or human fallibility. Over time memories can become factually inaccurate, sentimentally embellished, or forgotten. A photograph acts like an entry in a diary; it jogs the memory and links the moment described to a network of events, circumstances, relationships, and inconsequential details that extend beyond the limits of the original source. It is these interconnected, random memory scraps which constitute the experience of our individual past. Rather than being a false support for memory, as Sontag suggests, the photograph offers a chance to revisit incidental moments which are, finally, the accretion of our present psychology. So it seems justified that discreet moments which occur during the play of larger events are rewarded an

immortality they would never otherwise have had, as they are the sediment our lives are made up of.

The portrait photograph offers different levels of access into the network of memories which branch from it. *Puzzle* (1999)²¹ shows the upper body of a woman in three narrowly separated moments of an action sequence. As the title indicates, the three images typify the process involved in solving a jigsaw puzzle; looking, choosing, and trying. However, the sombre posture and expression of the subject, and her tired, deliberate movement, suggest the existence of a deeper puzzle. This idea is reinforced by the three remaining pieces of deleted background - a flower in a vase, a photograph on the wall, a row of books - whose ambiguous and fragmentary definition relegates the work itself to a puzzle. For the photographer and the sitter, this image acts as a key to memories of past events, albeit from individual points of view. On another level, viewers who know (of) one or both protagonists are once removed from events and bring to the work a different set of memories. Viewers with no relationship to the persons or events depicted bring to the work a different sensibility, as they have no direct access to the image's wider associations. Discussing Sontag's thoughts on this, Price and Wells (1997) relate that:

she draws attention to the fascination of looking at photographs in terms of what we think they might reveal of that which we cannot otherwise have any sense of knowing, characterising photographs as a catalogue of acquired images which stand in for memories. (p. 40)

In discussing the stability of meaning in photography, McQuire (1998, p. 54) suggests that the photograph is fragmentary, a notion which accentuates the importance of seriality "as a structure of photographic meaning," and in turn diminishes "the claim of any single image to completely capture its subject." While *Puzzle* (1999) conjoins three images, this has not been for the purpose of reaching a better understanding of the subject because of the deficiencies of the single image. Instead, a series of images is used in the service of the overall concept, in which a sequence of postures has been included in order to picture the subject's physical deliberation of a problem over time. This solution highlights the fragmentary nature of the photograph and the work itself. For as McQuire (1998, p. 54) asks, what photograph is not "a fragment of a larger, more inclusive

²¹ See Image L, p. 85.

whole," since every photograph is "already the result of selection and framing; in short, of montage"?

Although *Puzzle* (1999) is not specifically a photographic narrative, it is interesting to note Berger's thesis on the relationship between memory, montage, and lived life. He argues that the photographic narrative form places the subject being reflected "before the task of memory: the task of continually *resuming* a life being lived in the world" (Berger & Mohr, 1982, p. 287). Berger (1982, p. 287) contends that this approach is unconcerned with events as facts, but rather with "their assimilation, their gathering and their transformation into experience," becoming a narrative form that "if it does narrate, it does so through its montage." A sequence of still photographs contains an energy that resembles "the stimulus by which one memory triggers another, irrespective of any hierarchy, chronology or duration," thus becoming like "the field of memory" (Berger & Mohr, p. 288). Berger (1982, p. 289) concludes by suggesting that photographs displayed in this way "are restored to a living context . . . a context of experience," in which their ambiguity "at last becomes true." According to Berger (1982, p. 289), this allows what photographs show to be "appropriated by reflection The information they contain becomes permeated by feeling. Appearances become the language of a lived life."

Sontag brings to our attention the predatory nature of taking a picture. She suggests that "to photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed" (Sontag, 1978, p. 14). In *Caravan Christmas* (1999)²² two men are partially depicted in two separate visual fields that abut. The man on the left appears to have been photographed from a greater distance than the man on the right. His situation in the background is emphasized by his low position on the horizon, partially obscured by a packet of orange juice, on an otherwise empty visual plane. The man on the right has lunged into an unseen foreground for a handful of potato crisps. His active visual presence in the space has been treated with a more closely cropped composition, and greater three-dimensional depth (unfortunately it is impossible to see the difference in depth from a front-on perspective). Although these informal, domestic portraits are not nearly as aggressive or exploitative as Avedon's work, there is still a sense of ambush in the moment of their making.

²² See Image M, p. 86.

When seated at the table for Christmas lunch there is little opportunity to avoid the camera's stare; it is an intrusion that is at the very least quietly endured, since photographs are often taken on such an occasion. In this instance, due to being a family member, my subjects were relatively at ease before the camera. However, two things were noticeable. As the photographer there is an awareness of the control held over the subject in terms of how the subject is composed within the frame, and the moment chosen in which the subject's visage is to be frozen indefinitely. The other aspect of interest during the photographic moment is the subject's performance before the camera. Kozloff (1995, p. 107) points out that social performance "is more commonly understood as an improvised means to negotiate and perhaps to defend ourselves in scenes where we have some latitude but no recognized edge of power."

In *Caravan Christmas* (1999) the man in the background looks out quizzically from his bunkered-down position. During the taking of the photograph the subject was perhaps unsure of my intentions, choosing to maintain a low profile rather than to overtly acknowledge the photographic moment. Or perhaps the subject was aware, as I was, that his low chair made his presence seem insignificant, and a little amusing, within the surrounding space. Concealed behind sunglasses, the man on the right anticipates the portrait moment, choosing activity over idleness in order to register a more dynamic appearance. Sharing his thoughts on the portrait photo session, photographer Gerard Malanga (cited in Wise, 1981, p. 113) says: "I'll try to look for a situation where the subject gives himself fully to the occasion by unmasking himself . . . without trying to make the subject aware of my intentions." Contrary to Malanga's position, I believe it is the individuality of the sitter's performance, or their attempt at performing, that is of more interest: an 'unmasking' of the subject both suggests a lack of sophistication toward the portrait transaction, and presupposes that a candid glimpse provides a more truthful representation.

The five works discussed in this chapter share common aesthetic and ontological content: all the images depict friends or family members preoccupied in a particular activity, with each image being the source for memories of relationships, places, and circumstances. Individual works have been conceived during personally meaningful occasions, from which most traces of the location and surroundings have been obscured. References to these occasions, and the environment in which they took place, remain within the photographic details, gestures and actions, foreground silhouettes and shapes,

and each work's title. The photographs have been taken in an informal manner from an insider's point of view. Robert Mapplethorpe (cited in Wise, 1981, p. 135), talks about his position as an insider and the importance of communication, advocating intimacy and contact as ingredients of good portraiture. In my work the decision to photograph people within my social milieu was not to attempt to unmask their true selves, or to rely on intimacy and contact as the predominant motivation for the final work. The benefit of photographing people I know is that it provides access to private moments, and in turn those who are the subject of the portrait are relatively comfortable with my presence. At the same time their concentration on other things, while they may be performing to the camera, gives an informality and naturalness to their physical bearing.

As in the other portraits, *Ping Pong* (1999)²³ depicts people engaged in another activity while being photographed. The couple are aware of the camera's presence but their physical behaviour is given over to the activity in which they are involved. Their attention is focused on a point beyond the frame as they await their opposition's next play, although despite the associations of recreational fun, their isolation in a green void leaves them strangely conspicuous and alienated. The decision to photograph subjects when they are preoccupied in another pursuit is not made in order to probe for a deeper revelation of their personality, as is evident here where nothing extraordinary has been uncovered. It is perhaps the opposite which is true; what has been uncovered through close observation is the ordinariness of the shapes we cast in daily life.

Capturing these shapes relies on two observational factors. One is a sensitivity to unfolding events, social behaviour, and the ways in which people arrange themselves within their environment. The other factor is to do with the camera's technology, for as Sennet (1994, p. 96) reminds us; "the lens has greater powers to capture the significant spontaneous moment than the naked eye." In *Ping Pong* (1999) the lack of perspective presents the viewer with the incongruous pairing of a small man whose profile is replicated by the curves of a giant woman. Their arms hang parallel while the man shields his eyes from the sun in a typical gesture of salute. While these symmetries, gestures, and distortions of scale are made conspicuous by the later application of a deep-etching technique, their existence and appropriateness at the time of photographing were never envisaged. Even though the final image may have been carefully selected from similar photographs of the same event, the camera's serendipity is nevertheless to be

²³ See Image N, p. 87.

acknowledged. McQuire (1998, p. 50) defines the lucky photograph as; "that chance encounter or fortuitous snap which reveals aspects of a scene about which the photographer was unaware at the moment of taking." He suggests that it is the camera's speed and mechanization which makes it the perfect tool for a Duchampian rendezvous: "Even the most rigorously 'staged' photograph exudes the power of contingency, offering delight in the unexpected and inexplicable stab of significance that Barthes termed *punctum*" (McQuire, 1998, p. 50).²⁴

I would like to discuss the final image, *Breakfast 2000* (2000),²⁵ in terms of its existence as an art object, and the creative decisions that have made it so. Coleman (1998, p. 155) acknowledges that much visual art exists not only as images but also as tangible, physical objects where "the materials and methods employed in generating a work become integral to the work upon its completion, and affect our responses to it." Awareness of the decisions made by the artist in a work's construction, to the extent that they are left visible in the work, is a way for the viewer to enter the process of creative communication (Coleman, 1998, p. 155). In *Breakfast 2000* (2000) three people appear to be sharing a private moment, propped up by their elbows over a negative arc of breakfast shapes. Photographed at different intervals during the one session, their individual portraits have been juxtaposed in a triptych, however, missing visual cues have resulted in a degree of ambiguity over their inter-relationship; they seem to be both responsive to a group dynamic, while at the same time caught in private reflection.

Several visual elements and aesthetic decisions have coalesced to bring this work to fruition. Berger (1982, p. 119) articulates this process perfectly when discussing how the "single constitutive choice of a photographer differs from the continuous and more random choices of someone who is looking." Berger (1982) believes photographers know that a photograph simplifies:

The simplifications concern focus, tonality, depth, framing, supersession (what is photographed does not change), texture, colour, scale, the other senses (their influence on sight is excluded), the play of light. A photograph quotes from appearances but, in quoting, simplifies them. This simplification can increase their legibility. Everything depends upon the quality of the quotation chosen. (p. 119)

²⁴ Barthes (1982, p. 26) defines *studium* as an interest in photographs which is "a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment . . . but without special acuity," while the *punctum* is that element which disturbs the *studium*; "A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me."

²⁵ See Image O, p. 88.

In a painted portrait, selections are made from the visual field "eliminating characteristics and details that do not accord with its maker's aims" (Bryson, 1998, p. 131). *Breakfast 2000* (2000) has been constructed in a similar way where certain elements, or what Bryson (1998, p. 131) calls "a plethora of stray or random information falling outside the given scope of interest," have been obscured from view. For Bryson (1998, p. 132), the central concerns within a photograph are constantly at risk of being engulfed by "the surrounding welter of non-significance," or what he calls "informational noise," a problem taken into consideration during the conception of this work. The resolution of this problem has seen a severing of the figures from their environment, however, Berger (1982, p. 126) notes that "when isolated, photographed gestures and expressions become either mute or caricatural" unless "they contain and are confronted by an idea." As discussed in this chapter, these images have been individually created with specific issues in mind, and are conceptually linked by aesthetic and thematic concerns. While viewers may bring varying degrees of insight to the visual expression of these issues, it is hoped that each portrait retains an openness or reflective space in which to reveal themselves slowly over time. The stilled image allows for observational inspection never afforded in the normal flow of events, as in *Breakfast 2000* (2000) which begins to look like a study of human gesture reminiscent of Baroque painting. An example of this effect is given by Silver (1995, p. 76) in his description of work by artist Alex Katz whose "cut-out, painted portraits . . . remove the sitters entirely from a context, allowing them to enter our environment as sculpture might."

Berger (1982, p. 106) speaks of certain moments in life that defy the passing of time, not because they are unforgettable, but because "within the experience of such moments there is an imperviousness to time." Some examples are moments of "achievement, trance, dream, passion, crucial ethical decision, prowess, near-death, sacrifice, mourning, music" and are, according to Berger (1982, p. 106), common to human experience and the material of all lyrical expression. Due to the acceleration of historical change since the eighteenth century and its devaluing of a sense of the timeless, Berger (1982, p. 108) believes that; "Consequently the common experience of those moments which defy time is now denied by everything which surrounds them." Because of these developments, experiences that prompt the term 'for ever' "have now to be assumed alone and privately," however to preserve these moments "hundreds of millions of photographs, fragile images . . . are used to refer to that which historical time has no right to destroy" (Berger & Mohr, 1982, p. 108).

The images discussed in this chapter are not illustrative of those moments that are for Berger resonant fissures in our experience of time passing. While there is no doubting their occurrence, the metaphysical and ephemeral nature of such moments makes considered documentation difficult. Still, there is consensus with the sentiment of Berger's statements in terms of the many other moments in daily life that are inflected by our relationships with others. These moments may seem insignificant and mundane, and many of them are, however, portraiture offers a way to represent what has been underrepresented or not represented at all (De Salvo, 1995, p. 31). To confirm this, De Salvo (1995, p. 31) suggests that; "For many artists, the portrait, especially the photographic portrait, offers an opportunity to control representation, to influence how the depiction is made and then reinvest it with personal meaning." The images selected above have been culled from several others for their reproductive qualities and individual significance, and the opportunity to revisit and reassess past influences.

Kozloff (1995, p. 96) describes the process of portrait painting as "the result of a notion of a subject . . . coded in expressive marks that are accrued over time." Regardless of the accuracy of the image, "it is built up through subjective memory or conjecture," and through manual application it is "synthesized or revised in a cumulative, relatively long-term process" (Kozloff, 1995, p. 96). I have approached these personal portraits in a similar way - taking images from the past and reworking them with the benefit of elapsed time, as in De Salvo's (1995, p. 36) description of Billy Sullivan's process; "he first takes photographs and makes paintings later, so that he can situate himself in the moment twice." Nicholls (2000, p. 53) notes in a review of this work how the "paint has been applied *in hindsight*, giving the works a life after the moment the photograph was taken," thus singling out the subjects for attention so that; "each image looks how you would remember the event - the photographs are evidence of relationships, not places or circumstances." Despite Berger's concept of moments that touch on a sense of 'for ever' and the accrual of subjective memory over time, the photograph remains as a record of a moment that is lost forever; the idealization of these moments reveals loss "as a fundamental part of everyday lived experience" (Nicholls, 2000, p. 53).

Conclusion

Discussing society's relationship with vernacular photographs and commercial photography, Holland (1997, p. 142) suggests that people engage professional photographers because they abide by the rules; it is the adherence to convention that gives such photographs their power. If these photographs live up to viewers' expectations, they do so "precisely because their familiar structure is able to contain the tension between an ideal image and the ambivalence of lived experience" (Holland, 1997, p. 142). In this way conventions offer a framework within which the various realities we inhabit are summoned for reflection. The conflation of the ideal image with the ambivalence of lived experience forms the essence of much of the portrait practice discussed in this thesis. Through creative endeavour, as opposed to amateur and commercial enterprise, artists also seek to probe or question the structures of photographic convention and representation, in terms on their influence on issues such as subjectivity and identity. Pitts (1991, p. 8) argues that as society and the issues of representation become more complicated and fragmented, "it is obvious that no single approach to portraiture can supply more than a piece of the puzzle that is identity." Brilliant (1991) wonders what modern portraits can hope to represent given that in the twentieth century:

the traditional view of the fully integrated, unique, and distinctive person has been severely compromised by a variety of factors, commonly accepted as causing the fragmentation of self and the perceived decline in the belief that the 'individual' is a legitimate social reality. (p. 171)

While Clarke (1997, p. 117) proposes that it is not so much individual personality that is changing, but rather its visual representation which may "reject the codes through which identity ... is assumed, determined, and declared."

As discussed in preceding chapters, traditional and historical forms of portraiture present a range of challenges for contemporary practice. Kozloff (1995, p. 104) reminds us that the camera's elemental function is ideal for picturing the material environment, but has shortcomings when employed as a means to "penetrate the invisible psyche"; "Portraiture is really a difficult art which pursues an elusive aim with limited equipment." In the attempt to fully represent the subject, the portrait has previously relied upon the repetition of socially encoded formulas such as the clichés of pose, point-of-view, and framing. However, the portrait's humanistic pretensions, "its desire to

capture the individual spirit or personality," are compromised by the need to produce generalized meaning through these "socially encoded formal devices" (Berger, 1995, p. 95).

Another aspect of this dilemma is articulated by Woodall (1997, p. 9) when she relates how the quest for a "good" photograph of someone" amongst a newly developed set of prints is usually accompanied by an "ineffable sense of disappointment." This experience alludes to a discrepancy in the photograph's ability to convey someone's 'presence' in pictures made for the purpose of identification. While the photograph's indexical nature is apparent, the quality of 'likeness' has become elusive, as noted by Woodall (1997, p. 9) who suggests that the "fixed, immovable features of a portrayed face can seem like a mask, frustrating the desire for union with the imaged self." Issues around these concerns have encouraged artists to choose portraiture as a genre in which to further explore notions of human subjectivity and mimetic representation. According to Van Alphen (1997, p. 254), "the project of 'portraying somebody in her/his individual originality or quality of essence' has come to an end." Contemporary artists are more likely to contest ideas about subjectivity and identity, and challenge conceptions of mimetic representation. Even though a critique of the authority of bourgeois subjectivity has undermined its relationship with mimetic representation, Van Alphen (1997, p. 254) believes this has not led to the genres demise, but rather opened it up to "new conceptions of subjectivity and new notions of representation."

While a genre such as portraiture is influenced by its historical traditions, artists such as Warhol have shown that it is possible to liberate the genre from its history "so that it can become an arena for new significations" (Van Alphen, 1997, p. 254). Sobieszek (1999, p. 136) describes how, in the classic modernist portrait, the face is often encountered in a blank arena, isolated from the body and its context, where it is open for external investigation. Such manipulation has occurred in order for the artist to convey an interpretation, such as described by Avedon (cited in Sobieszek, 1999, p. 136) who believes that the real nature of the sitter is not made accessible by simply stripping away the surface: "The surface is all you've got. You can only get beyond the surface by working with the surface. All that you can do is manipulate that surface - gesture, costume, expression - radically and correctly." The blank, expressionless surface as a site for reassessing accepted forms of subjectivity is epitomized in Warhol's portraits of

celebrities, models, artists, musicians, and friends during the 1960's and 1970's.²⁶ Warhol had no interest in the representation of a subject's inner character or their private feelings, but rather his interest lay in the iconic nature of their public facade (Sobieszek, 1999, p. 151).

Around ten years later, the media savvy, critical style exemplified by Warhol was being usurped by a growing number of real-life, documentary-style photographers. Kozloff (1994, p. 102) wrote in 1987 that 'critical' photography "has become so familiar as to be unexceptional when it appears." He felt those "feeling states and emotional truths," which constitute a large part of human consciousness, were being neglected by photographic portraiture and were an embarrassment to "prevailing intellectual scepticism" (Kozloff, 1994, p. xvi). Instead, Kozloff (1994, p. 102) advocates work such as Goldin's that, while pursuing familiar themes of family and life-style in narrative form, achieves credibility "from the way it jumps right into the swim of behaviour that appears to be happening spontaneously." Other supporters of Goldin and her contemporaries claim that such work represents the "welcome return of documentary and portrait photography in all their sincerity, transparency, and capacity to function as a 'window on the world'" (Kotz, 1998, p. 210).

These perspectives seem misguided in relation to recent critical thought which has "rejected the notion that acts of looking and recording can ever be neutral, disinterested or innocent," since they are seen to contain and express "relations of power and control" (Price, 1997, p. 58). The confrontational style of portraiture, as practised by Goldin and Billingham, is an example of the imbalance of power in the relationship between the photographer and the subject. The instigation of this approach as the means to get 'closer' to the subject is dubious, for as Gage (1997, p. 125) points out, "apparent intimacy has not brought any inevitable penetration of character," rather it has further questioned what is meant by 'likeness.'

Thomas Struth's project negotiates a delicate path through issues of subjectivity, realism, and representation. To achieve this he has chosen a neutral, objective vision of reality and a precise technique that informs his work. A mitigating view of Struth's sanitized aesthetic can be found in comments made by Chuck Close (cited in Rexer, 2000, p. 41) who believes that; "Expressiveness in art has become the property of

²⁶ See Image C, p. 76.

extremes, but Mondrian showed that rigour can be expressive and evocative." Struth's portraits reflect the methods he employs; they suggest formality and impersonality, and disregard the picturesque and the spontaneous. However, instead of coming across as hard and indifferent, Struth's subjects convey a living presence because of the space he has created for them in which to exist (Sennett, 1994, p. 99). For Visser (1998, p. 24), this approach shows that "communication does not need to be reduced to visual slogans, or photographs to illustrations of an image-critical model."

In discussing subjectivity in reference to Struth's portraits, Buchloh (1998, p. 160) argues for a "universal regime of anomie," within which only residual forms of traditional bourgeois subjectivity still exist. Buchloh (1998, p. 160) believes that the subject, deprived access to other avenues of self-determination, appears in the "obsolete genre of the portrait" only as "the melancholic image of a lost subjectivity." Or because "existing residual forms of subjectivity necessitate the deployment of obsolete genres and representational conventions to claim credibility against the increasing evidence of anomic relations and the loss of the traditional forms of subjectivity" (Buchloh, 1998, p. 160). In depicting his subjects within the context of family and home, Buchloh (1998, p. 160) wonders whether Struth is picturing the social unit "sustaining the communicative bonds in its smallest context," or whether he is recording the conditions of the social unit "in the last phases of its own disintegration."

In direct opposition to Struth's treatment of the western middle-class subject is Nan Goldin's practice in which "disintegrated subjectivity appears merely as spectacularized 'Other'" (Buchloh, 1998, p. 161). Buchloh (1998, p. 161) describes Goldin's "seemingly radical work" as "a typical example of recent victim photography" that, despite the suggestion of an intimate and private relationship between the photographer and her subjects, "ultimately merely delivers these images of the 'Other' to . . . the voyeuristic desires of its clientele, the collectors and the institutions." Buchloh (1998, p. 161) suggests that Struth's project is intentionally opposed to the kind of practice that victimizes its sitters, "a critical position that counters the exploitative complicity in Goldin's work." According to Buchloh (1998, p. 162), Goldin's practice accentuates the subject's demise without acknowledging existing examples of interaction that "oppose the socially enforced destruction of subjectivity," as evidenced in Struth's portraits. In Goldin's (1996, p. 146) defence, writing in a reprinted edition of *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (ten years after it was first published), she asserts that her pictures

are now "more introspective, quieter, and not about extremes of behavior . . . they're more focused and there's more clarity."

Another aspect of the genre that is in evidence and given priority in Goldin's work is what Charlesworth (2001, p. 5) calls a "slavish acceptance of the immediacy of the photographic real." According to Charlesworth (2001, p. 5), the nature of the real presented to us is merely a range of "mutually exclusive preoccupations particular to each artist." Charlesworth (2001, p. 5) also notes that a lack of montage and artifice in current photography is perhaps the result of a need to "reassert our belief in the technically authentic photograph's privileged access to the real." Such a need is indicative of a familiar dilemma in photography's attempt to represent reality; "how to photograph that which cannot be photographed" (Walker, 1995, p. 244)? This problem is not only confined to contemporary photography, as is confirmed by Walter Benjamin (cited in Walker, 1995, p. 244) who proclaimed that; "less than ever does the mere reflection of reality reveal anything about reality."

So in considering the diffusion of identity, the elusiveness of likeness, Buchloh's thesis on the demise of bourgeois subjectivity and the subsequent obsolescence of the genre in which it is represented, and a misplaced reliance on photographic reality, what will be the relevance of, and our need for, the photographic portrait in the future? Responses to issues surrounding this question encompass a variety of opinions. In the case of Struth's re-engagement with traditional models of subjectivity, Buchloh (1998, p. 162) believes that what is at stake is "the representation of its dissolution which constitutes the condition of subject experience at this very moment." At an individual level, Silver (1995) predicts an "endless need" for portraiture, since a portrait not only identifies the subject, but is a document about looking:

Even when the adored objects of our gaze have departed, we never forget what it *feels* like to look at them. That is what the portrait gives us, the purest sense of subjectivity in relation to another that we know. (p. 82)

In contrast, Sobieszek's (1999, p. 285) view, from which there is little chance of restitution, is that the mysterious element that characterizes us as human - spirit, subjectivity, interiority - "is for the most part inexpressible and ultimately unnameable," while similarly Schneider (cited in Sobieszek, 1999, p. 290) contends that the "end of the search for 'essence' is in sight."

An alternative strategy for expressing the inexpressible is offered by some of Goldin's contemporaries, such as Jack Pierson and Mark Morrisroe, who also produce work based on their own subcultural milieus that is both personal and intimate. However, these artists resist the explicitness of the documentary style favoured by Goldin, allowing their work to refer to that which remains outside representation. Kotz (1998, p. 214) believes that such an approach "provides a compelling challenge to the documentary tendency towards total specularization." For Kotz (1998, p. 214), these artists present an experience which "remains mute, ineffable. You're only given a little access, but maybe that's an antidote to being given too much." This idea is echoed by both Sontag (1978, p. 24), who suggests it is the very muteness of that which might be comprehended in photographs which "constitutes their attraction and provocativeness," and Charlesworth (2001), who believes that:

The point is not that art should expect to reproduce mechanically the appearance of the real, merely to reveal it, but that in the anyway synthetic organization of its forms it should seek to reflect and enact a similar complexity, one which nevertheless offers an intelligible experience of what may not be immediately apparent. (p. 5)

Charlesworth (2001, p. 5) continues by indicating that the irony in much contemporary photography, such as advocated by Goldin and Billingham, "is not that it presents an excess of reality, but rather that in fetishising the substance of its many discrete aspects, it hardly ever gets near."

One of the most influential aspects of the photographic portrait, for other artists and writers as well as myself, is its association with loss and immortality. Goldin (1996, p. 146) believes that "pictures can preserve life rather than kill life," although by the time of the *Ballad's* reprinting many of her friends had died; "So for me, the book is now a volume of loss." The portrait photograph as a document of loss, and a metaphor for our desire for immortality, is reiterated in Warhol's later works in which he is perhaps suggesting that "the portrait is our feeble attempt to fight off death itself and capture forever our best performance" (De Salvo, 1995, p. 57). De Salvo (1995, p. 57) believes that it is this connection with immortality that accounts for portraiture's historical durability. My own work addresses the issue of loss, not solely in terms of the immortality that the photograph prescribes for the subject, but rather in terms of the photograph's momentary incursion into a subject's life time, and the subsequent preservation of that moment now past.

Epilogue

Finally, a brief mention needs to be made of photographic portraiture's digital future. While this topic lies outside the remit of this thesis (the digital medium has not been a concern or a means of production for my own, or the majority of other photographic work referred to in previous chapters), I will briefly touch on some of the main points since they form a relevant coda to the historical survey undertaken in Part One, and some of the issues of contemporary portraiture discussed in Part Two.

There are many predictions concerning the future impact of digital imagery on photography, necessarily arrived at through varying amounts of conjecture. Batchen (1999, p. 10) counts two potential crises resulting from the introduction of computerized images, one technological and one epistemological, which threaten us with "the 'end' of photography and the culture it sustains." Such a proposition has come about due to developments in computer-based image production that deny traditional perceptions of photographic truth and reality. Price and Wells (1997, p. 25) confirm this when they suggest that "the possibilities of digitalisation and reworking of the photographic image have increasingly called into question the idea of documentary realism. The authority attributed to the photograph is at stake."

This has come about because of how the digital medium has disrupted the image's connection to the physical world. Batchen (1999, p. 18) states that the chemical photograph is evidence of the person portrayed having once been in front of the camera, present in time and space, since the photograph's distinctive quality is that it depends on "a referent in the material world" that existed and became imprinted on a sheet of light-sensitive paper. He suggests that while reality may have been transcribed, manipulated, or enhanced, "photography doesn't cast doubt on reality's actual existence a photograph of something has long been held to be a proof of that thing's *being*, even if not its truth" (Batchen, 1999, p. 18). In contrast, the digital image has no material lineage, such as the developed print and celluloid negative, by which it can be traced back to an encounter with the physical world. Instead, according to Batchen (1999, p. 18), digital images "have no origin other than their own computer program their referents are now differential circuits and abstracted data banks of information."

As well as severing the link between reality and image, digital technology allows for the previously unimagined control over an image's manipulation so that the final print has the appearance of a traditional photograph, while any interventions are undetectable to the eye. The ease of manipulation and its seeming authenticity has cast doubt on the digital image's integrity. However, Batchen (1999, p. 17) points out that in the history of photography all images have been manipulated in some way so that "photography is nothing but that history." Photographically transcribing the world from three dimensions into two is necessarily an artificial process involving alterations of exposure times, colour balance, image size, etc., so that in the end "photographs are no more or less 'true' to the appearance of things in the world than are digital images" (Batchen, 1999, p. 18). According to Batchen (1999, p. 15), the main difference is that while photography still claims "some sort of objectivity," digital imaging is "an overtly fictional process" that has abandoned "even the *rhetoric* of truth," previously an important part of photography's cultural success. For Batchen (1999, p. 15) these characteristics of the digital process have returned the production of photographic images "to the whim of the creative human hand" so that digital images are now "closer in spirit to the creative processes of art than they are to the truth values of documentary."

While entertaining the new possibilities for image creation that the digital medium promises, it is important to remember that the conventions established to make these new forms of visual communication and expression meaningful have to come from somewhere. As Lister (1995, p. 21) points out, new kinds of production conventions, forms of exhibition, institutions, and audience and consumer practices do not exist as "pure forms waiting to be divined," but emerge in negotiation with existing forms of photographic culture. This culture is itself the result of the skills, practices, and conventions which have been historically cultivated around the still photographic image as outlined in Part One. In this respect the acceptance of the digital image has parallels with the early photograph, in that to begin with "the photograph's status as evidence and record (like its status as Art) had to be produced and negotiated to be established" (Tagg, 1988, p. 6).

Another aspect of the new technology's emergence within photographic culture is the role played by companies and industries which design and manufacture the products that dictate how we will see. In his summation of the pre-digital photographic industry, Tagg (1988, p. 17) delineates between the ownership and control over photographic

processes held by large multinational corporations, and the more limited and standardized forms of technical knowledge and equipment that is made available to the consumer. In comparison, the hardware and software for digital imaging, in combination with traditional processes, now at the disposal of contemporary practitioners is of a quality and complexity far beyond that which has been previously available. Thus artists today have access to a range of powerful photographic tools and processes that offer a greater degree of image manipulation and creative control than ever before. These factors, in association with the issues discussed in this thesis, indicate the future possibilities open to photographic portraiture's continuing attempt to visually represent our experience of life.

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Image A



Nadar. George Sand, c. 1864.

Image B



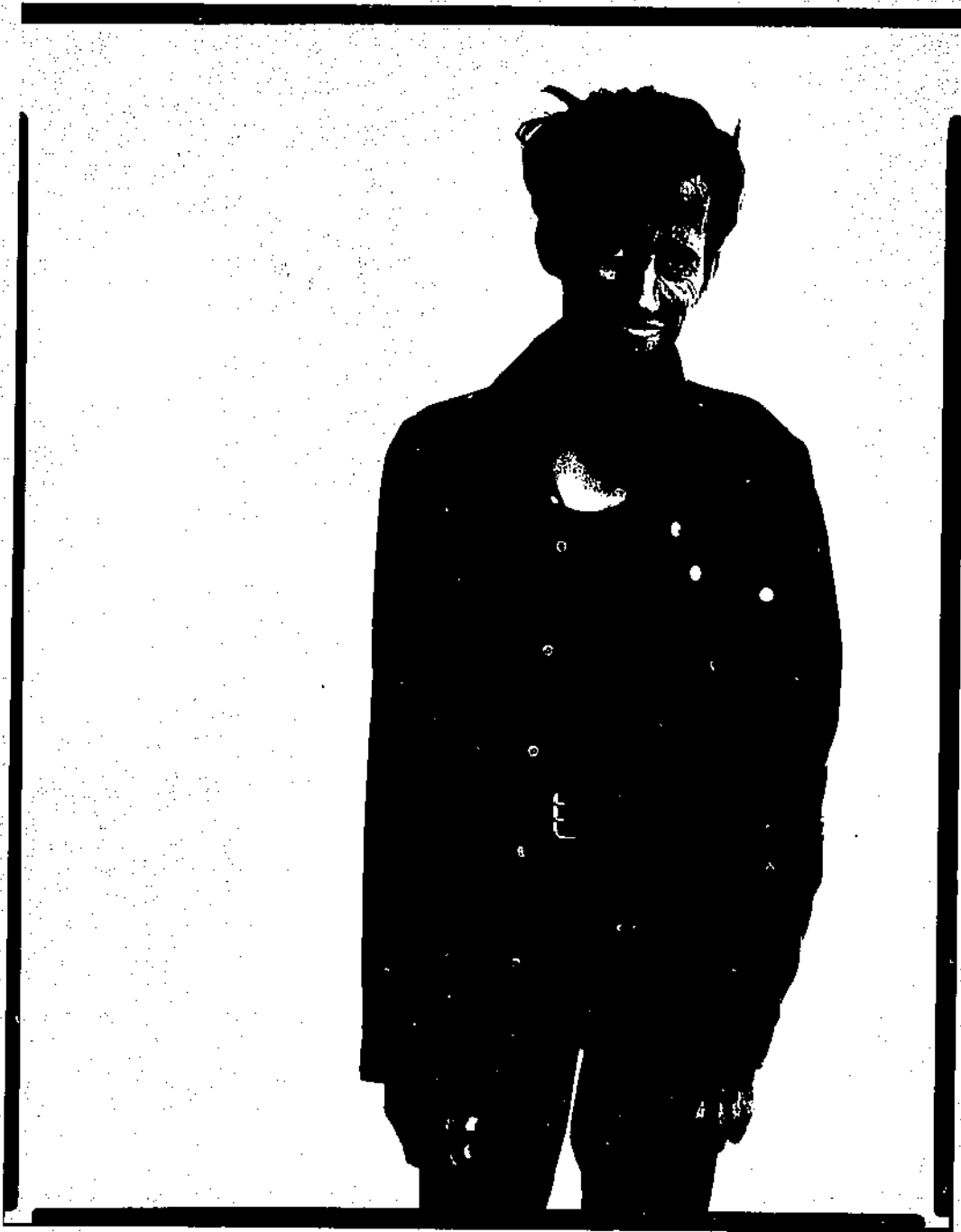
August Sander. Provincial Family, Herdorf, c. 1911.

Image C



Andy Warhol. Martha Graham, c. 1970.

Image D



Richard Avedon. Richard Garber, drifter, Interstate 15, Provo, Utah, August 20, 1980.

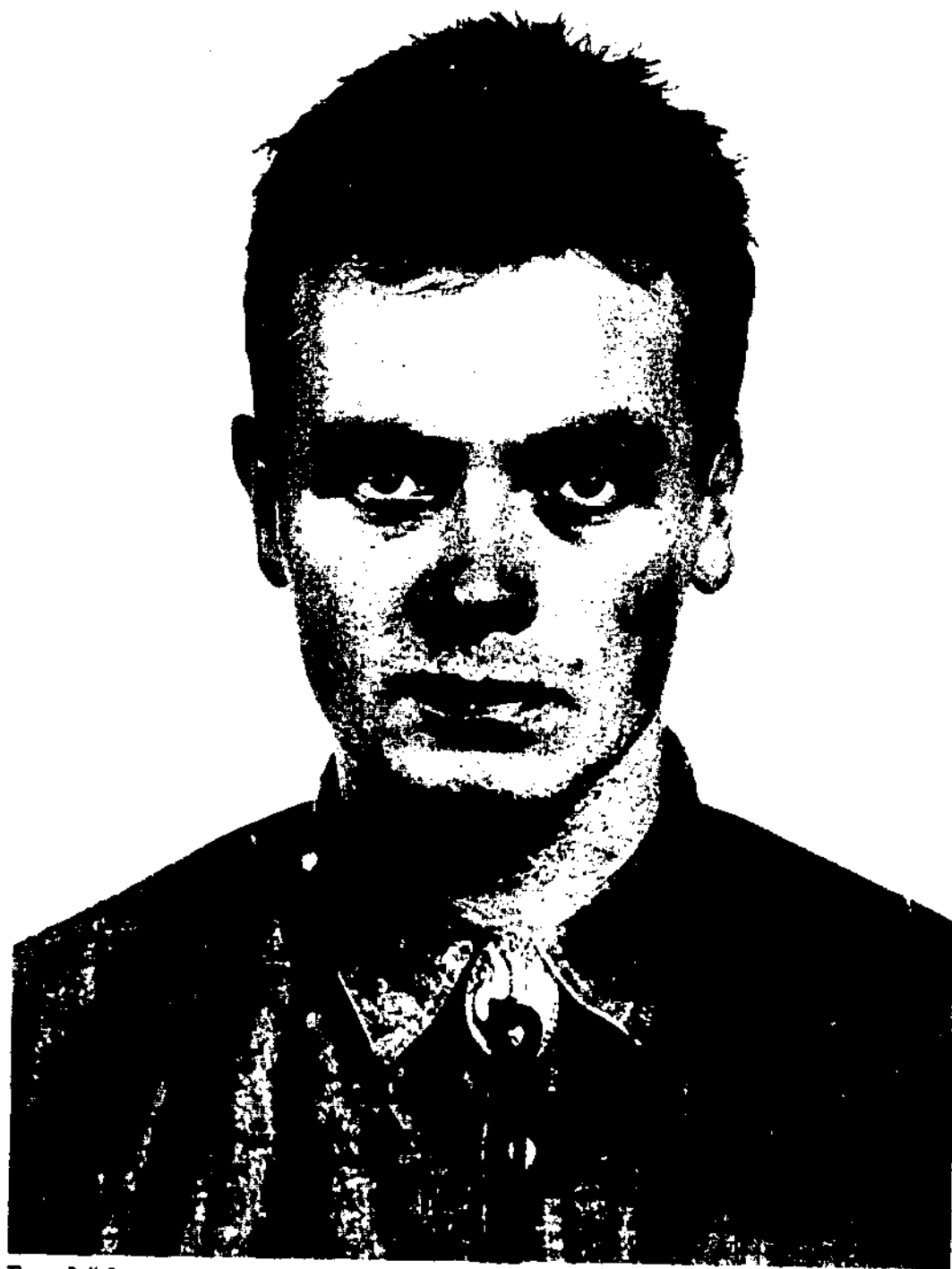
Image E



Suzanne crying, New York City 1985

Nan Goldin. Suzanne crying, New York City, 1985.

Image F



Thomas Ruff, *Portrait*, 1987

Thomas Ruff. *Portrait*, 1987.

Image G



Nancy Burson. Untitled, 1989.

Image H



Thomas Struth. The Smith Family, Fife, 1989.

Image I



Richard Billingham. Untitled from *Ray's a Laugh*, 1996.

Image J



Jack Pierson. Deuce Shot: Dave Fiorina, 1997.

Image K



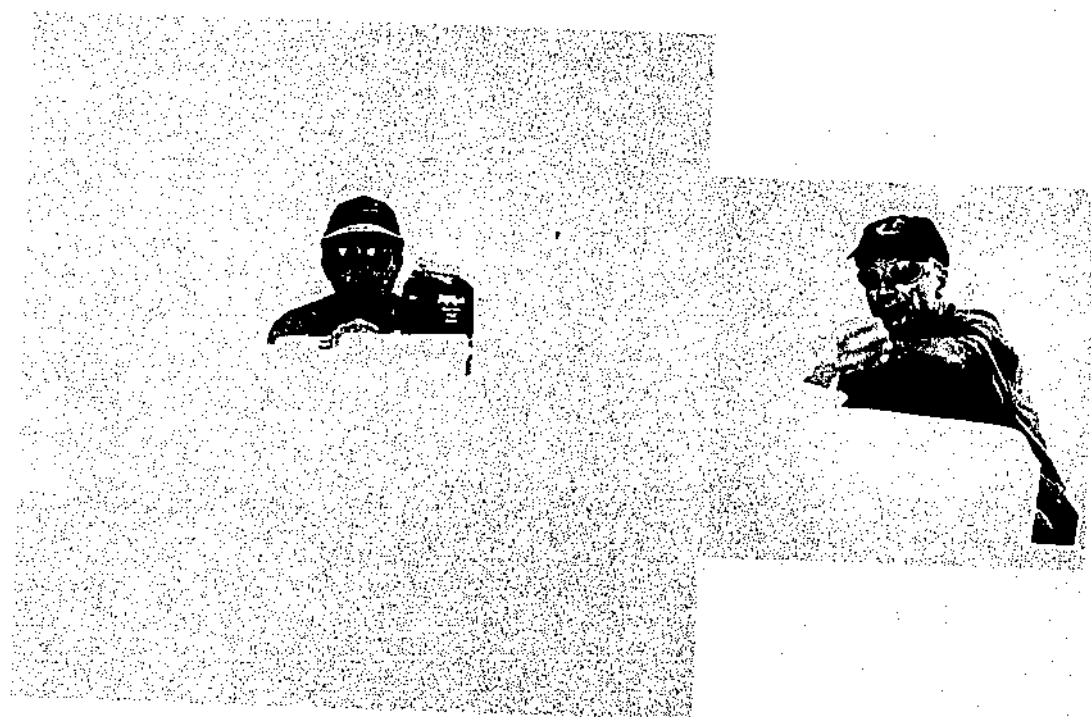
Richard Munsie. *Cast Away*, 1999.

Image L



Richard Munsie. Puzzle, 1999.

Image M



Richard Munsie. Caravan Christmas, 1999.

Image N



Richard Munsie. Ping Pong, 1999.

Image O



Richard Munsie. Breakfast 2000, 2000.