

# WHERE DO, I LIE?

*questions on identity, performance and death*

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EMILY O'HARA

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I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment is made.

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What is the relationship between naming and identity? How does language legitimise a space of performance? Is the lie central to the status of performance? What is the role of the other in relation to performance? From these sub-questions the overarching research question emerges: Through relations of self and other, naming and language (spoken, written, visual), creative spaces of performance manifest that testify to conditions of truth. Ultimately this 'question' tests out truth in relation to performance for my ongoing creative set and spatial design performance practice that is constantly interested in the spatio-temporal borders between self and others.



This research engages the creative practices of filmmaking, photography, spatial installation and performance. It culminates in a gallery installation of serial interlinking works that instantiate the question of identity in relation to naming via the image and text, time and space, movement and death. Further the work enquires implicitly through a question of spatial design not only via installation practice but also through concerns for set design and the spatiality of time both on and of what constitutes the event of performance. This research is concerned with naming and identity as related to the photographic image, written and spoken word. The research is critically framed through Roland Barthes' writing in 'Camera Lucida' (1980). This text uncovers a relation between the subjects in photography that is essential to the framing of my practice. Barthes names three subjects in the photographic arc; Operator, Spectator and Spectrum. These terms work as an underlying principle in the manifestation of my practical work. Barthes' text is also instrumental in my reading of death in the imaged identity.

Walter Benjamin's essay 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man' (1996) provided a moment of revelation with respect to communication that has served as the basis for my examination of language. Benjamin's text is an examination of the space between the divine and the human, and as such provides a site through which I trace my examination of the space between name and identity. It is also framed through Jacques Derrida's notion of deconstruction. I seek to interrogate and re-imagine the photographic, filmic and performance based outcomes of my practical work in the manner that Derrida examines literary texts. This process uncovers, in the way of Derrida's reading practice, a 'keystone' through which the works can be re-read. These frameworks provide the site in which I seek to uncover the relations between naming, identity, performance and death.

This project also touches on how domestic space and gender stereotypes condition the way we behave as an aside to my core research questions. The act of naming the child is closely linked to expressions of domesticity and Gaston Bachelard's 'The Poetics of Space' (1994) provides insight with regards to both identity and domestic space. Bachelard asks us to encounter spaces that we

inhabit daily, spaces that have become ordinary, in a new way. His notion that the spaces we live in shape our memories is extended in my practice to include spaces created via performance. I aim to interrogate how the temporal space of performance can fold the space the 'other' inhabits back and forth through recollection.

Name and gender are the first accepted indicators of identity according to institutionalized practices. I am haunted by the ideal woman, she who cooks, cleans, takes care of the children, she who always looks and smells immaculate and tantalising, she who puts herself last. I am interested in how images (photographs, film and memory) create in their making, a future tense that we must become (or are trapped into their becoming). Is it possible that in my name lies the answer to how my imaged identity has been created?



There are clear links between the ideas of naming and identity, perhaps less clear links between performance and death, and even muddier the relations between the four. My practice, both artistic and as a set designer for theatre, design methods through which I am trying to develop these relations. The research questions critically frame the work for the academic realm, but the true heart of the work, and what is really at stake for me, is a continuation of research that began in my undergraduate years. How do I know who I am? How does who I am come to be? This 'I' is not a finite, immovable, unchanging state. It is not a destination that will be reached upon finding 'the' answer, and so the shifting ground of identity is temporarily stabilised only by continuing to ask questions of it. In this MA research my starting point for identity is the name, and as such this practice evolves a series of works that question the proper names of my self. Not only my given name, but also the other names by which I am called, or will come to be called in the future<sup>1</sup>.

My 2010 Honours research was primarily concerned with questions of performativity, of how we perform our 'self' to the other. I made use of traditional and non-traditional performance sites in order to flesh out the questions of how we perform in the everyday. I was most interested in the significance of how performances are legitimised, or acknowledged. I see less and less difference between the traditional sites of live performance such as musicals or theatre, and live performance in the everyday, such as brushing my teeth. This goes back to a question of locating an *outside* to performance. At the conclusion of my Honours research I located this possibility of being outside performance as an entirely paradoxical one, as in order to perform we must assume that there is a state of not-performing. If performing means nothing other than being yourself, this seems somewhat impossible. This avenue of enquiry results in an impasse, whereby performance exists outside of ourselves, but also inside of ourselves wanting to know the other and translate the other through our own identity. If this MA research has developed further from here, I would suggest that it is in its attempt to acknowledge this impasse as the fallacy of inside/outside binaries. That is, the construction of an inside/

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<sup>1</sup> By which I mean that I am called Emily, Wife, Mother etc.

outside duality closes down the ongoing performance of our lives, artificially separating out self and other — rather, the border crossing of self and other relations is complex and often immeasurable in terms of clearly demarcated and fixed borders.

This Masters research deconstructs these two binary performance codes (one acknowledged as performance, the other not) by way of the lie. I seek to test the relations between performing, and lying. This question also deepens my inclination to test the boundaries of language, and take chances with hidden meaning, subterfuge and duplicity. The role of the lie, or of lying, in this research is central to my deconstruction of naming, identity, death and performance. The act of lying is bound also to the ideals of truth, right, wrong and justice. In a later section I will address these concepts through Emmanuel Levinas' idea of the ethical subject, and how he frames the other's difference in relation to the self.

The significance of death in relation to performance is two fold. Firstly image and name are forms of representation and performance that structure identity. They take up 'our' place of being and future-becoming. In each moment of its performance in our place it (the name, image, representation) erases the immediacy of us – our becoming. The image/name/representation absents us (as it performs us) and in this modality we die. Every image is a moment of death. Each representation that images us inters our body as surely as a coffin. It *fixes* and that body can no longer move. It cannot speak, or hear or smell. We die a thousand deaths, over and again (see Footnote 25 on Barthes' thoughts on relations of authenticity and inauthenticity). Secondly, performance in its liveness houses death in its inability to limit reaction, interaction and change. In contemplating the myriad of interactions/outcomes that *could* occur during live performance, those realities are *alive* until the planned performance occurs, at which point the expression of the performance kills the other possibilities that could have occurred. The actuated performance names itself, thereby killing its capacity to exist in any other way. Grief now enters the space of live performance, as one may grieve the imagined (ghost) interactions that could have occurred, in much the same way a woman might mourn for the son she *might* have had, on the birth of a girl.

The origins of this thesis lie in two moments. The first being the occasion of my naming around 28 years ago. The second, finding a box of slides from my mother's childhood nearly three years ago. The slides show my mother and her siblings<sup>2</sup> during the time they lived in Singapore. They also show my grandparents, Emmeline and Robert Aries, both of whom are now dead. Emmeline Elsie Maisey, was born on March 1<sup>st</sup>, and died of cancer on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1976. I was born nearly 8 years later, and my name, Emily, is in honour of her. These two origin points for this body of research are impossible

to untangle from each other, the relation between my naming, and those photographs, is at the core of my discussions here. However, in order to define my research I will first critically frame the element of the photographs, and the notion of naming (and further a deconstruction of language) will be framed in a subsequent section. The notion of performance will be briefly framed through a combination of work from Michael Kirby (1972) and J.L. Austin (1962). Death will be discussed in relation to all of these elements.

Finally a note on the style of writing in this exegesis. The style of this writing performs something akin to informal, anecdotal and confessional tenors. It is a style inherently performative with respect to the thesis question of how naming/imaging constructs both a facility for proper and improper identities simultaneously and in this sense (im/propriety) conditions questions around truth as correctness (stable) and the truth of untruth (as that which constitutes the ground for lying as another truth). This personal and impressionistic style that circulates around my experience of being with images/photographs/texts activates a question of truth around the genre of academic writing. It aims (only tenuously) to undo the conventional academic voice in an attempt to weave the reader closer into the fictive tenor that circulates around the question of a lie (as performance both theatrically and everyday). That is not to say this writing lies or is a fiction in terms of the proper of academic conventions (but maybe it hints at this?). Rather it aims to reveal something through the personal and intimate tone that in an academic setting can easily be reduced or construed as false. In this way the voice takes on a confessional idiom. In this way the central voice or tenor of this writing subtly challenges the voice of analytic argument inherited via the techno-scientific registers in the university for the staple-diet of academic writing. It does so in part to also demonstrate that creative-led research is often intimate, inventive, unstable and beyond the values of scientific-truth proofs evident in the style of academic writing. Further, it aims (as already suggested) to bring the reader closer to the ethos of the creative practice (before you are actually able to witness it).



The background image is a faded, artistic photograph of a person wearing a long, flowing red garment, possibly a dress or a robe, standing in a modern, brightly lit interior space. The person is positioned in the lower half of the frame, facing away from the camera. The space features large windows, a concrete pillar, and a metal railing. The overall tone is soft and ethereal.

# Critical Frameworks



*How comes the world to be here at all instead of the nonentity which might be imagined in its place?*

~ William James (1968)

My introduction has stated that my research is primarily concerned with naming and identity. I am concerned with the relation that I bear to myself across time. I see identity as a collection of ‘selves’ that are present at different times and spaces according to context. Identity is what makes me *me*. Questions of identity ask how, or what, makes me different to another. It seeks to do this by comparing our very sameness, how are we same to the other, and how are we the same to ourselves? In doing so, we are able to not only consider the notion of identity through the negation of the *other* other, but also through the negation of self against self, my *own* other.

Questions of identity could be said to be based on the difference between outside and inside. Gaston Bachelard, in ‘The Poetics of Space’ writes about the dialectics of outside and inside.

Entrapped in being, we shall always have to come out of it. And when we are hardly outside of being, we always have to go back into it. Thus, in being, everything is circuitous, roundabout, recurrent, so much talk; a chaplet of sojournings, a refrain with endless verses...thus, the spiralled being who, from outside, appears to be a well-invested center, will never reach his center. The being of man is an unsettled being which all expression unsettles. (Bachelard, 1994)

If expression unsettles us, then there is something here about the movement of interchange between identity as represented or imaged and outside of ‘us’, yet integral to bringing us about (or out). Bachelard’s quote almost indicates that the inside is mythic as an ideal separating or essence for our becoming to exist in different forms of language or expression. Identity is not fixed and finite. It is in a constant state of flux, we are always *becoming*. This research aims to uncover some of the ways that we are always *becoming* our self.

pre scribe	<p><i>verb (used with object):</i> to lay down, in writing or otherwise, as a rule or a course of action to be followed; appoint, ordain, or enjoin. <i>verb (used without object):</i> to lay down rules; direct; dictate.</p> <p>Latin praescribere: to direct in writing, literally, to write before or above, equivalent to prae- + scribere: to write</p>
in scribe	<p><i>verb (used with object):</i> to address or dedicate (a book, a photograph) informally to a person, especially by writing a brief personal note in or on it, to mark (a surface) with words, characters, especially in a durable or conspicuous way, to write, print, mark, or engrave.</p> <p>Latin inscribere, equivalent to in- + scribere: to write</p>
de scribe	<p><i>verb (used with object):</i> to tell or depict in written or spoken words; give an account of, to pronounce, as by a designating term, phrase, or the like; label, to indicate; be a sign of; denote, to represent or delineate by a picture or figure.</p> <p>Latin describere, equivalent to de- + scribere: to write</p>



Can photographs of others prescribe, inscribe and describe aspects of one's identity? I believe so. It is possible that photographs, and naming, have the power to define aspects of our future identity, as well as future behaviour. They mark the surface of our identity. To prescribe is to lay down, in writing or otherwise, a course of action to be followed. I will attempt to explain my position via Roland Barthes reflections on photography in 'Camera Lucida', an interview with Japanese artist Hiroshi Sugimoto and the film 'La Jetée' by Chris Marker.

I observed that a photograph can be the object of three practices (or three emotions, or of three intentions): to do, to undergo, to look. The *Operator* is the Photographer. The *Spectator* is ourselves, all of us who glance through collections of photographs – in magazines and newspapers, in books, albums, archives...And the person or thing photographed is the target, the referent, a kind of little simulacrum, any *eidolon*<sup>3</sup> emitted by the object, which I should like to call the *Spectrum* of the Photograph, because this word retains, through its root, a relation to "spectacle" and adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead. (Barthes, 1980)

Barthes shares his reflections on photography from a very personal position, whilst attempting to intimate at a depth with which we can read images, and further, read ourselves *in* that reading. There are several aspects of this text that have impacted this research, some of which I will cover now, and others that will emerge later in this document. The initial thing that captures me in 'Camera Lucida' from the quote above is his framing of Photography, and his questioning of it, is quite clearly stated to be from the position of the Spectator, (and perhaps later the Spectrum) a position with which I sympathise. I do not seek to address photography or photographs from the position of art, or as a master photographer, but rather for the affects and effects they have on me as

<sup>3</sup> **Eidolon** (from Greek) meaning form, shape; a phantom-double of the human form; Latin *simulacrum*] The astral double of living beings; the shade or perisprit, the kama-rupa after death before its disintegration, image, idol, double, apparition, ghost. The phantom which can appear under certain conditions to survivors of the deceased.

a subject. His inclusion of *eidolon* especially intrigues me in relation to being named after my grandmother with its significant expression for my identity. Am I perhaps some kind of shade, some kind of shadow of her prior existence? Equally does she haunt me in every existing and future image of myself? That is, as a shadow of her or as a shade of her, I (we) are, perhaps, inevitably, and always, linked. The point of connection remains unclear and is a significant juncture point for relations between death, performance, naming, image and identity.

Barthes goes on to detail analogue photography as being at the intersection of two distinct procedures, the first one of a chemical order: the action of light on certain substances, and the other of a physical order: the formation of images through an optical device. I immediately think that there might be a possibility of a non-material photograph forming through the ‘mind’s eye’, and that this happens through the sharing of a memory that one had not, or need not have, lived through their own flesh and blood. I think of the ‘mind’s eye’ acting as the optical device that responds to a shared memory in the same way that a camera lens captures an image. The mind’s eye works to form the mental photograph by way of assembling various ‘stock’ images captured throughout one’s life, of what is described, all of which adds up to form a mental photograph. In this sense, it may be possible to have non-material ‘photographs’ or memory-images. Because it is a mental construct, and non-material, the details can shift and change, sometimes being more detailed, other times less. In this way there seems to be a parallel with film based photography, whereby a print from a negative can deteriorate over time, depending on the environment in which it is kept. This method seems even more viable when I consider the origin of both words. Memory is from the Latin *memoria*, equivalent to *memor*, to be mindful, to remember. Image is from the Latin *imāgin-*, stem of *imāgō*, being a copy or likeness. So, a memory-image is both a copy, or likeness, of a memory and a reminder to remember. In finding identity, memory is key. If you don’t know where you’ve been, how do you know where you are going, or if you are returning to yourself?

As an example, when my mother tells me that I swim like my grandmother, favouring sidestroke, the optical device of my ‘mind’s eye’ (the eye being that which a camera lens was designed to simulate) provides an image. I see a pool that looks something like where I swim in Henderson, I see my grandmother in the water, her bathing costume like something I saw on ‘Mad Men’<sup>4</sup>...and what’s more, this process is even better than a photograph, because my mind’s

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<sup>4</sup> *Mad Men* is an American television series created by Matthew Weiner. *Mad Men* is set in the 1960s, at the fictional Sterling Cooper advertising agency on Madison Avenue in New York City. The focal point of the series is Don Draper (played by Jon Hamm), creative director at Sterling Cooper, and the people in his life, both in and out of the office. As such, it regularly depicts the changing moods and social mores of 1960s America.

eye works in three-dimensions, and so does the memory-image<sup>5</sup> which I want to refer to as a Memage. I like the poetic capacity of the memage, of the possibility to build a history of memagery in order to share time and space with those who it would not otherwise be possible to do so.

Upon seeing the slides of my Grandmother those three years ago, I was reminded of other photographs I have seen of her. I can't remember specifically when I saw the first one, how old I was, where I was, nor can I remember when I knew that I had been named after her. I've just always known that I was. The conduit through which I have any knowledge of my Grandmother is *my* mother. I have, on many occasions, shocked my mother with some gesture, some habit, some peculiar way of doing something that would remind her of *her* mother. I swim sidestroke, I rearrange furniture in the house "just because", I obsessively straighten pictures hanging on walls. What if I learned these behaviours through viewing images of her? The combination of Memagery and Photography could be the reason why I behave, or display behaviours that are shadows of hers. Is this some hangover from her? Because I have her name (because even though I'm not Emmeline, my Emily is intended to be so) do I also have her habits? Let me leave her behind for a moment however. I believe that it is not only possible for a photograph of another to inscribe behaviour upon identity, but it is also possible with a photograph of yourself.

The nature of photography is that it is active in the 'present' moment, when the shutter button is pressed, but it is also already active in a future moment. The act of taking the photo implies that it will be viewed at another time in the future. A photograph of me as a child, wearing a dress, holding a doll, wheeling a play carriage, is a communication to my future self. In this way, a photograph could be said to be inscribing, prescribing, or describing to me, what my identity is, or what my behaviour should be. The magic of a photograph is that it exists simultaneously for the past, present and future. The significant spatio-temporal location of the photograph (and hence its power to shift us through time and space) is not always easy to define. If I am in front of the camera having my photo taken, that is the present, but the printed photograph of that moment also exists in the future, as I look back at it, which means it is also already

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<sup>5</sup> As I write this I hear a similarity between 'Memory-Image' and 'Memento Mori'; that instruction to remember our mortality. To me, photographs are the very thing that provide our immortality. I am beginning to think that the only way to remain mortal, to really be able to die, is to remain unphotographed, or to destroy all photographic evidence of yourself. However, my attempt with this notion of the memory-image, is to prove that non-material photographs are possible, which makes it *impossible* to destroy all evidence of one's existence, so, we are after all, immortalised in one form or another. My name acts in the same way, it is a linguistic photograph that seeks to immortalise an *other* (my grandmother) in the living me. In this sense the immaterial is given validity as having existed – as an existent – as my 'mental-image-photograph' deconstructs the notion of life and death or living as alive and present. This tangent also brings into proximity the extension of processes invented for remembering such as writing and photography and the process innate to human memory.

existing in my future's past. And then, the moment in the future in which I hold the photograph is *also* a present, and the material of the photograph *again* indicates that I will look at it in the future, and so I see myself looking back at it again, and so on, and so on. What do you see when you look at a photograph? A photograph represents an apparently still moment that happened in the ever-ongoing movement of life. When we look at a photograph I believe that whilst the photograph shows stillness, we still read movement. We understand the still image as a paused movement, a break, or 'inter-ruption'<sup>6</sup>. Professor of Art Writing (Goldsmiths University of London) Yves Lomax believes that at the moment the camera snaps, and the interruption begins, time splits in two directions, to one side it goes in the direction of 'no longer', and at the same time it goes in the direction of 'not yet', both of which she says, has nothing on either side to terminate it, there is no delineation of particular time in this moment, just that it is present and infinite, where does it begin and end? It is impossible to say how long it lasts, as the central point, the photograph, which becomes the break between 'no longer' and 'not yet', causes by its presence a thread of time to continue extending in both directions, simultaneously. (Lomax, 2006) The finite moment here is considered in light of performance and death relations.

The photograph acts as a bridge, a conduit, between the different 'I's' in each of those spatio-temporal locations. Any photograph depicting me is a potential indicator of my identity, and so I will either move towards, or away from it. Of that childhood photo, I could easily say "The adult me is not like that, I don't have children, I don't wear dresses" or she could say "The adult me is like that! I have a child and I still love wearing dresses". Either way, the photograph serves to inscribe my identity by way of deduction, either I *am* like what the photo inscribes, or I *am not*. I do not mean to say that identity is bound in what we *appear* to be, or the things we play with, or what we wear, but rather that what we *appear* to be comes from what we *do*, and what we do *is* an indicator of identity, or how we know who 'I' is. It should also be noted that identity is constructed by the other who took the image (the Operator) of 'I'. This is a more nuanced interest in this thesis that becomes more significant upon the concluding moments. As I have suggested, firstly my interest lies in the Spectator and Spectrum (ghost, haunting). The Operator is something that is evidenced more explicitly in my creative practice (particularly the final work that will be discussed later in this document). In reviewing a photograph of a time in which the Spectator was not present in flesh and blood, the absence of the Operators physical presence in the image allows the Spectator to take the place of the Operator.

Chris Markers film 'La Jetée', shot primarily in black and white stills has

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<sup>6</sup> Inter - a prefix occurring in loanwords from Latin, where it meant 'between', 'among', 'in the midst of', 'mutually', 'reciprocally', 'together', 'during'. Inter-cept; inter-rest, in time.

become a benchmark film to question our understanding of time, memory, power and struggle. To me, *La Jetée* is a love story, the love a man has for his memories, memories I believe are always anchored by a physicality. The images he creates through dream experience experiments are images that are not happening for the first time, they come from other images he created at an earlier time in his life. It is the singular image of the ‘man’ dying at Orly that haunts him. In my reading, it is his after-image made in the present-past-future jumble of his memories that constructs a self-fulfilling prophecy. The film argues that the three states of time co-exist, and so he must know, even as a child, that it is he who dies, and all his actions lead him to precisely that outcome. The image is his destiny – his destining.

One of the most interesting things that *La Jetée* stirred up for me was a realisation that not all moments are the same: yet what is the catalyst that makes some of them more poignant? Why do we remember some things and not others? Or is it not so much a lack of remembering but rather the lack of the appropriate trigger to stimulate a particular memory? And perhaps most frustratingly, and paradoxically we don’t know what we don’t remember, until we remember it. Photographs, in their physicality act as a portal, a vessel, or reflective device. Memories are the driving force for what pushes us forward. It is in the act of remembering where we have been, who we have been and what we have done, that we explode the bounds of our previous actions and delve into something new. We are a product of our continuing movement through time and space, a direct result of everything that leads up to every moment of our existence, knowing that “we are perfectly, completely visible to a gaze that observes us from afar” (Copjec, 1994) and perhaps that gaze is our future selves.



Fig. 1. Chris Marker, Film Still from *La Jetée*.



Fig. 2. Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Tyrrhenian Sea*, Photograph.

*Water and air. So very commonplace are these substances, they hardly attract attention - and yet they vouchsafe our very existence. The beginnings of life are shrouded in myth: Let there water and air. Living phenomena spontaneously generated from water and air in the presence of light, though that could just as easily suggest random coincidence as a Deity. Let's just say that there happened to be a planet with water and air in our solar system, and moreover at precisely the right distance from the sun for the temperatures required to coax forth life. While hardly inconceivable that at least one such planet should exist in the vast reaches of universe, we search in vain for another similar example. Mystery of mysteries, water and air are right there before us in the sea. Every time I view the sea, I feel a calming sense of security, as if visiting my ancestral home; I embark on a voyage of seeing*

- Hiroshi Sugimoto

Japanese artist Hiroshi Sugimoto likens photographs to fossils, believing both to be a record of history. The main difference being that fossils are created over many millions of years, while he refers to photography's instantaneity. He doesn't here refer to instant photography like Polaroids, he is pointing to the scale of time between a 450 million year old fossil, and the instantaneity of a photograph in relation, to freeze a moment that can be archived for distant future reference. He says 'photography functions as a fossilisation of time' (Sugimoto, 2006). Sugimoto prizes older mechanical cameras over digital cameras, he places extreme emphasis on the craft of making photographic prints, having studied chemical processes and eventually creating his own method of developing, particularly for large format negatives. His studio is on the top floor of a New York brownstone, facing north so that he never gets direct sunlight, but rather the 'beautiful reflection of the sky'. He uses no artificial lights and relies solely upon window shades to control the amount of light on the subjects, or objects that he photographs. Here the space of the studio is an extension of the photographic apparatus. Space becomes an expanded image-capture technology. In Sugimoto's view, photographs are fossils, they are objects that store time, not only do they store the time in which they were taken, they also act as a memory-store.

All this we know, these concepts of photographs as fossils, as relics, as tokens of memory, are not new. What makes his thoughts on fossilisation and attention to craft significant to my field of research is not necessarily a new field of enquiry either, but it is important to me. I am of the generation that has experienced both analogue and digital photograph making. As a child, I remember desperately wanting a camera, I remember winding the film for each shot, I dropped off rolls of film to the pharmacy and waited days, or sometimes weeks, for the pictures to be returned to me. The last time I remember buying film (until my recent spatial practice returned me to photography) was in Dubai, with my older stepsister, when I was about 14. After that, I lost interest in taking photographs for a while, and when my interest returned, the digital age had been born.

When I think about Sugimoto's craft based practice I note how different it



is from my own. While I am now beginning to work with film developing and negatives, I have prior to this been absolutely digitally minded. A recent article in the New York Times caught my interest as highlighting the importance of the time between the shift from analogue to digital technologies, and the importance of preservation as that shift occurs.

Jennifer Schuessler's article 'The Muses of Insert, Delete and Execute' (Schuessler, 2011) outlines the goal of Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, a professor of English at the University of Maryland. He is aiming to recover the literary history that got lost, one 'casual deletion and trashed document at a time' as writers switched from the typewriter to computer based word processing programs. While his focus seems to be on answering the question of which writer first used a word processor to write a novel, I am more interested in his comments on preservation. He says, "There's going to be a window from the first couple of decades of personal computing when people weren't thinking about preservation. A lot of material from that era may wind up being lost."

It is difficult to answer the question of why preservation was not considered at this time. As a document changes, as words are edited, they disappear and reappear in different configurations. The text enacts a temporal performance where the type-writer made a physical mark on paper. I can only imagine that there were as many typewritten manuscripts torn up, burnt and buried as there have been digital documents unsaved, edited and trashed. I'm not sure preservation is actively thought of during the emergence of *any* new technology, the excitement of the new shadows the potential loss of the old. Paradoxically, we have no way of knowing that something might have been lost (unpreserved) unless *some* example of it remains.

In the shift between film and digital photography there may also be a time (how long we'll only know from the future) where preservation was not at the forefront of our intentions when it comes to the physical manifestation, or the collection of, photographs. Digital photography rarely gets printed in my experience (outside of photographic professions). What I am interested in are the photographs depicting daily life, the birthdays, and dinners, trips to the beach, all of the inane, everyday and magical moments that happen in one's life. We still capture these moments, and they are still faithfully displayed in albums, but these albums have now also undergone a shift into the digital realm. With the world population at around 7 billion people, there are more than 800 million active Facebook users (*Facebook Statistics*) uploading their digital photos, into digital photo albums, and hopefully, saving the original file in a safe location. At the heart of my fear is that we are not yet out of the preservation woods. Whilst we are certainly no longer in the first decade or two of personal computing, I still fear that in 50 or 100 years there will be no record of this time. Digital files, once deleted, once the hard drive, or motherboard is corrupted, trashed, broken, sitting in a toxic dump, cannot be retrieved. There is something fearfully abstract and intangible about digital photographs that



never make it to print, and I worry at the loss of them for future generations. While there are probably more photographs being taken now than at any point in history thanks to the technology revolution and the invention of smart phones, I suspect that we will end up with far fewer preserved examples of photography from this era than any other to date.

Schuessler remarks;

The study of word processing may sound like a peculiarly tech-minded task for an English professor, but literary scholars have become increasingly interested in studying how the tools of writing both shape literature and are reflected in it, whether it's the quill pen of the Romantic poets or the early round typewriter, known as a writing ball, that Friedrich Nietzsche used to compose some aphoristic fragments. ("Our writing tools are also working on our thoughts," Nietzsche typed.) (Schuessler, 2011)

How then does our dive into the digital realm shape photography and our response to it? More keenly, how does it shape our thoughts? Particularly with respect to the immediacy of it, and further, how does this link to what seems to be a wide spread (perhaps only currently fashionable) interest and love for vintage effect apps on smart phones like Hipstamatic, Tilt-Shift generators, and LoMob which allow us to have digital recreations of photographs that look as though they were shot on film?

Digital photography is in fact, in its very immateriality, becoming closer to the process of memagery. Photography performs today more than ever, as a representation of our mental being. In our process of becoming we take these images as a way of inscribing our imaged identity upon our selves. As we are always becoming, in the quest of this becoming the immediacy of the digital image is perhaps the process which reveals us to ourselves.

As a return to analogue processes in my practice this year I have been using a medium format camera and working with the negatives it produces. What has struck me about both slides and negatives, is that in order to understand the image, to commune with it, you have to spend a little longer deciphering it. A photograph makes this easier, and a digital image easier still, meaning you have to spend less and less time with the image, which I believe means, that you have less chance of connecting with it, which means less chance of connecting with yourself. Whilst I feel secure in the idea that memages can be created, they inhabit a different space than that of the photograph. One of the defining features of a photograph (in the analogue process) is that it is physical, tangible object. While it has the capacity to activate a kind of time travel through a past-present-future simultaneity of being, it is always physical; it shares space with flesh and blood. Memages inhabit a mental space, they are not physical, or touchable. They may describe haptic experiences, but exist in a space more

akin to daydreams, or reverie.

I fervently hope that as the glamour of the digital age recedes slightly in the face of environmental and social pressures, that the inclination towards vintage effect photography also hints at a return (at the very least) to printed photographs, and at the very best, a return of all analogue photography techniques to the mainstream.

This desire perhaps indicates a nostalgic impulse. As my practice will reveal I make use of objects in an attempt to commune with the other. The condition of a photograph, which represents a fixing of time and space and identity, is one such object. In our process of becoming, these objects serve as reference points. However this desire reveals the contradictory nature of being. Desire is for fixity and this is understandable given the legacy of metaphysical desire for truth as correctness and certainty. We are however contradictory creatures, both irrational and rational always.



Fig. 3. Emily O'Hara, Medium Format Negative, Othello #1.  
 Fig. 4. Emily O'Hara, Medium Format Negative, Othello #2.

Walter Benjamin's essay 'On Language as such and on the language of Man' is a short, dense, and sometimes impenetrable essay written in 1916. At times I wonder if part of its impenetrability owes to the fact that it is an undoing of the very thing it is written in, language and in this sense the conditions for performativity. I made use of two other texts in order to help clarify Benjamin's intentions in the essay, 'Walter Benjamin's Exegesis of Stuff' by Cheryl Beaver, and Beatrice Hanssen's 'Language and Mimesis in Walter Benjamin's Work'. Beaver outlines Benjamin's text as 'a complex piece of work that outlines a theory of language, that gives ontological priority to the creative word of God by way of a reading of the Book of Genesis'. Beaver cites the following passage;

The proper name is the communion of man with the creative word of God. (Not the only one however, man knows a further linguistic communion with God's word.) Through the word, man is bound to the language of things. The human word is the name of things. Hence, it is no longer conceivable, as the bourgeois view of language maintains, that the word has an accidental relation to its object, that it is a sign for things (or knowledge of them, as agreed by some convention). Language never gives *mere* signs. (Benjamin, 1996)

She says that here Benjamin is rejecting the emphasis in the arbitrariness of the sign found in Saussurean linguistics. The remainder of the passage rejects the mystical theory of language on similar grounds "the rejection of bourgeois linguistic theory by mystical theory likewise rests on a misunderstanding. For according to mystical theory, the word is simply the essence of the thing. That is incorrect, because the thing itself has no word, being created from God's word and known in its name by a human word". (Hanssen, 2004)

It is at this point that I feel I am beginning to understand something of Benjamin's ideas. In his words I hear that there is the word of God (which is creation) and that it is a pure divine language, it is infinite and cannot be spoken. After this, there is human language, which seeks to name the divine and pure. It is finite, it is spoken, written, it names the world of things.

In Alain Resnais 1961 film ‘Last Year in Marienbad’<sup>7</sup> (a film in which Chris Marker crewed for and learnt his craft via working with Resnais) the three main characters are unnamed in the film; in the published screenplay, the woman is referred to as ‘A’, the first man (who appears to be the film’s narrator) is ‘X’, and the man who may be her husband is ‘M’. Early on in the film we see A and X, outside in the grounds of a Chateau, bodies of water, marble balconies and statues surround them. Prior to this the narrator, X, recalls how he saw the woman with her hand outstretched upon a balustrade, looking down the main avenue, upon rows of sculpted topiaries, an almost perfectly symmetrical view of the grounds beyond, when he says:

I came towards you, but I stopped some way off and looked at you. You were now facing me. Yet you didn’t seem to see me. I was watching you. You did not move. I told you how real you seemed. You just smiled. I spoke of the statue. I told you that the man wanted to stop the woman. He must have seen some danger and was motioning his friend to stop. You replied that she was the one who had seen something. And that she was pointing out something breathtaking. Both explanations were possible. The couple had left home and had been walking for days. They’ve just come to the edge of a cliff. He holds her back to keep her from the edge. While she points to the sea stretching to the horizon. Then you asked me their names. I replied that it didn’t matter. You didn’t agree and started naming them without much thought. So I said they might as well be you and I. Or just anyone...Don’t name them. They may have had other adventures. (Resnais, 1960)

“Don’t name them” he says, “they may have had other adventures”, and here I see a definite link to Benjamin’s text. By naming the statues in human

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7 I would like to point out that the film title in French ‘L’annee Derniere a Marienbad’ has been translated as ‘Last Year *At* Marienbad’ for the US market, and ‘Last Year *In* Marienbad’ for the UK market. The difference between *At* and *In* could change the way the film is read. *At* suggests that the film is removed from us, that it happened *at* a place/space distinct from us, that we are not invited *in*. Conversely, *In* suggests inclusion in this space (in this case, inclusion in the events of the film). The differing translation of *At/In* provides ground for the viewer to place themselves either inside or outside the events of the film. Further, in initial attempts to clarify the correct translation of *at/in*, one source suggested that the film title would be *The Last Year at Marienbad*. In conversation with a French speaking friend, she confirmed that it was not *The Last Year at Marienbad* (which would be *La Annee Derniere A Marienbad*) due to French translation rules for the determiner (‘L’ or ‘La’ which is only included in a translation if you are referring to something quantative or specific, like *Le Chat*: *The Cat...ate the meat*). However, this potential openness led me to consider how the title *The Last Year In/At Marienbad* could drastically effect the way the film is read. *Last Year At Marienbad* is non-definitive; the possibilities of other years at Marienbad remain. *The Last Year at Marienbad* is definitive; this was the *last* year they were at Marienbad.

language, they become defined. The act of naming is the in-between of the divine and the human. Is it in this act that we limit the capacity of the creation? As though by naming the statues (the objects and things of creation) we limit them to only having certain kinds of adventures.

This moment in the film also says to me that we might well *all* be statues, that with the power to name things, other people can easily assign stories and names to us, like we are inanimate objects. In turn, that means that *we* can animate *others* by assigning names and characters and stories to *them*. Photographs act the same way, the subjects in photographs can easily be assigned any name, any circumstance, as such, we always see ourselves in the other, and so we are assigning our selves in each statue that we name as something else. We see ourselves in others, and we name others as ourselves. Benjamin (1996) suggests that ‘man communicates his own mental being *in* his language. However the language of man speaks in words. Man therefore communicates his own mental being by *naming* all other things...It is therefore the linguistic being of man to name things’. He suggests that *things*<sup>8</sup> communicate themselves to man, that the lamp, the fox, the mountain, communicate themselves to man, and as he names *them* he communicates *himself*.

In a subsequent scene, M (the possible husband of the woman, A) joins X and A, as they stand before a picture that depicts the very grounds they were in, and the statue they discussed. M approaches them and names the statue as Charles III and his wife, he gives specific details about it, thereby closing down, limiting, the possible adventures that the unnamed statues could have had, had their names remained unknown. This seems to me also a reflection of A and X as they discussed the statues, that the unnamed statues act as a metaphor for X, and his discussion with the woman. He is convinced that they have met elsewhere, and the unnamed statues allow him to live out this adventure with the woman, who tells the man they are strangers, and that she has never been to the places he thinks he may have met her. When her (possible) husband M enters the discussion, and names the statues, he is thereby naming himself also, he is naming the statue in order to name himself. He names himself in order to control the adventure the other man has had with his (possible) wife.

I read ‘On Language as such and on the language of Man’ as meaning that language, and naming things, is an attempt to communicate the truth of the divine spirit that animates us all. If you name it, it has no possibility of being other. The name is the boundary between the infinite and finite. That which is pure and infinite cannot be named, naming it limits it, makes it finite. If there is a pure/divine (and unspeakable) language of creation, then human language is its attempt to communicate itself, however imperfectly. It is in this imperfect

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8 “For regardless of the level of consciousness (or even lack of consciousness) that a being or thing possessed, each communicated spiritual content” (Benjamin, 1996)





Fig. 5. *Alain Resnais, Film Still from Last Year in Marienbad #1: A waits on the balcony.*  
 Fig. 6. *Alain Resnais, Film Still from Last Year in Marienbad #2: A and X discuss the statues.*  
 Fig. 7. *Alain Resnais, Film Still from Last Year in Marienbad #3: The statues in question.*  
 Fig. 8. *Alain Resnais, Film Still from Last Year in Marienbad #4: A and X discuss the statues in front of a picture portraying the grounds they were just in.*

human language that the name is able to define and bind, it is in the awareness of human language being imperfect that the binding comes loose. Ultimately it is this relation of binding and unbinding that my creative practice performs (as discussed in the ‘Practices and Processes’ section). Loosening the binding of name is what my practice seeks to achieve.

I keep returning to the shift between written language and spoken language. Through Derrida I believe that both are full of the potentiality for distance and absence, death and closure. Yet I also sense that speaking the name is closer to the divine than writing the name, with each more concrete expression of the name it gets further from the divine (further from the spirit, the spirit of God? Or the spirit of ‘me’?). But am I just continuing a Platonic binary between immaterial and material belief? Would the spoken not also be closer to the complication of immaterial thought together with an immediacy of embodied enunciation. The desire here is to complicate this Platonic ideal further. We have the thought, the sound, the sign...is there anything else? The sound of the sign in the mouth of the other? When a particular person speaks your name, it might sound more divine than when another speaks it. There is, for example, nothing divine in the mouth of the barista at a cafe speaking my name, but when it passes through my husband’s lips, along with his breath, it is approaching the divine, perhaps because the breath that passes with the sound is a reminder of our mortality together in this shared life. To breathe is to live, to speak is to breathe. I feel that the sound of the name (not the meaning which the sound represents in signs) is in its temporality, in its intangibility, is less open to difference, *because* it is less defined — or perhaps, it is pure difference as an affect of its irrecoverability, lost in the word that carries it. Of course, this ideal is destroyed simply by the invention of many aural recording devices just as much as writing or photography. And we know that Plato was always suspicious of mnemonic devices believing that they would destroy the ideality of pure thought!

Hearing the name is a call, a call to what? A call to locate identity. Identity is self, the call of the name is that which keeps alive and active, the passage, and constant reckoning between the divine, and the human. The binding power of the name is loosened by its continued calling, by continuing to call the name<sup>9</sup>. While naming paradoxically closes down the possibility of difference — it also opens it up. For instance, why would the longevity of a proper name keep its

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9 My name is a continued calling of my Grandmother. Though curiously, I’ve been told she hated her name. She was never known by it, or anything resembling it, other than on official records. She was Lyn, Lynsey, sometimes Lyndy. She was never Emmeline, Em, Emme, or Emily. I find it extremely difficult to know what to call her, both verbally and visually. I can’t call her Emmeline, because that wasn’t *her*. I don’t feel I can call her Grandmother, because I’ve had a Grandma my whole life, (my Grandfather’s second wife, Ellen Beatrice Aries) and it wasn’t her. It sticks in my throat to refer to her by a nickname, nicknames are what you use when you know someone well, which I do not. So, I vacillate between Grandmother as a formal address, or Lyndy.



viability if it had lost difference, its adventure to become other, for infinite possible futures? Even the fact that my Grandmother changed her name is a sign of its potential differing and deferring (*différance*) with respect to the stasis/stability of space and time.

If the name is the keystone<sup>10</sup> for how we know our self, then...it is also the thing through which we should always be seeking to interrogate the 'text's around us.

It is via this concern of naming that several aspects of my research arrived, not only do I seek to uncover how my particular name affects my own identity<sup>11</sup> but also how other names or more specifically, how a deconstruction of naming and language can disrupt the stability through which we communicate with one another.

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Between my questions on naming, and Benjamin's thoughts, I am convinced that a haunting occurs. This haunting is two-fold. Given when Lyndy was born, and the era in which she married, ran a house and reared children I have imagined the spectre of her as the idealized wife in the 1950s. This is, it turns out, a spectre of my creation. What I know of her from stories and a few remaining documents is that she threw teapots when she was angry, smoked like a chimney, drank like a fish, was the wife of an air force man, worked in the air force herself for a short time and as such, grew to hate unnecessary routines.

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<sup>10</sup> Derrida invokes the architectural metaphor of the keystone as that structural component which reveals the strongest stability in an architectural figure — here he is pointing to the figure of a text (any textual enterprise). If Deconstruction aims to reveal the multiple marginalized voices that exist in all texts (whether they are works of writing, architecture, art, design, speech etc), it does so by faithfully following (in commentary form) the dominant 'voice' of the text in order to locate the moment where the text seems so totally assured of its position. Derrida believes that this total, stable moment of assurance is the heightened moment of a text's biased position. It is the keystone moment when a text does not realize it is being closed off to other opinions, other ways, to difference per se. The keystone moment is the text's totalitarian moment that unwittingly suppresses all others — all other differences! Paradoxically (as is the way with deconstruction), the strongest moment contains the weakest moment, or moment of 'textual' vulnerability. It is at this point that deconstruction unhinges the text's bias, moving from a position of commentary to a position of interrogation to show another/ other positions that reside in difference to the totalized/certain/stable one. My work aims to embrace 'keystone' moments with respect to naming, representation (visual, written, spoken) etc., as that mark of a death in terms of solidifying identity, yet at the same moment (as Derrida's keystone reveals), other positions will be revealed that reside repressed on and in the margins — encrypted and decrypted this work aims to exhumate the stability of identity for other lives to live on. or further reading on the keystone please see: Jacques Derrida, *Disseminations*, op. cit. pp. 173-286 but also "The Filial Inscription" in *Plato's Pharmacy*, pp. 84-94.

<sup>11</sup> Why is this important? We all have names, and our parents — or those who named us — all arrived at that name for us by some process, whether we are named after someone else or not, so we all have a stake in this, to think deeply about that sound by which we are called every day.

As my practice deals with aspects of performance, it is vital that I frame my position on what performance means to me. My Honours research dealt explicitly with performance in the everyday. I marked a difference between commercial performance, artistic performance, and everyday performance. My interest still primarily lies with how we perform in the everyday, and my practice attempts to shift the ground of how we negotiate all three aspects of performance (both acknowledged and unacknowledged) *in* our performance of the every day. The everyday is contextualized through Michel De Certeau's 'The Practice of Everyday Life' (1984) in which I understand the everyday to be made up of the obscure background of social activity, that our everyday experience is located at the level of movements, gestures and practices. Performance is further contextualized through an essay by Michael Kirby 'On Acting and Not Acting' (1972). Continuing to blur the boundaries between these three modes of performance Kirby's text helps to define what I consider acting, and what I consider performing. Kirby refers to The Happenings<sup>12</sup> of the 1960s to clarify his distinction between acting and performing.

Acting means to feign, to simulate, to represent, to impersonate. As Happenings demonstrated, not all performing is acting. Although acting was sometimes used, the performers in Happenings generally tended to 'be' nobody or nothing other than themselves; nor did they represent, or pretend to be in, a time or place different than that of the spectator. They walked, ran, said words, sang, washed dishes, swept, operated machines, and so forth, but they did not feign or impersonate. (Kirby, 1972)

Performativity is an interdisciplinary term used to describe the capacity of speech and language in particular and is derived from J.L. Austin's book 'How To Do Things With Words' written in 1962. Austin outlines language as previously having been thought of only as being either true, or false. Austin called this a constative utterance and goes on to outline what he sees as the difference between the constative utterance, and a performative utterance. A constative utterance is something that can be said to be true or false, while a performative utterance 'is, or is a part of, the doing of an action' (Austin, 1962). Austin's belief is that 'in saying something, we are doing something' (Austin,

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<sup>12</sup> 'Happenings' is a term introduced by artist Allan Kaprow in 1957, and refers to a kind of performance, event or situation, which is considered to be art. They could take place anywhere, and use a non-linear narrative, and encourage the participation of the audience. Happenings tend to be formed around a key idea, but are left with room for improvisation and reaction. Kaprow himself describes them in the following way "A Happening is an assemblage of events performed or perceived in more than one time and place. Its material environments may be constructed, taken over directly from what is available, or altered slightly; just as its activities may be invented or commonplace. A Happening, unlike a stage play, may occur at a supermarket, driving along a highway, under a pile of rags, and in a friend's kitchen, either at once or sequentially. If sequentially, time may extend to more than a year. The Happening is performed according to plan but without rehearsal, audience, or repetition. It is art but seems closer to life. (Kaprow, 1966)

1962), and he uses several examples to prove his point. One such example is that of the sentence ‘I Do’ during a marriage ceremony, the uttering of that sentence is not constative in its ability to be categorised as true or false, but indicates an ongoing doing of a thing, an ongoing doing of the act of marriage. Another example is that of naming a boat by smashing a bottle of champagne over the prow and declaring ‘I name this ship.....!’ (Austin, 1962).

It is important to note two things about Austin’s exploration into the performative utterance beyond the initial idea that in saying something, we are doing something. He suggests that both context and authority are paramount to the success of a performative utterance. For example, if I say ‘I Do’ to the teller behind a bank counter, that does not mean we are married, further, if the person present when a couple say their ‘I Do’ to each other is not authorised to officiate that moment, it cannot be considered valid. For a performative utterance to be successful both the context and authority must be correct to the situation.

The relativity of Austin’s work to my research lies in its distinction on context and authority. The combination of performance, context and authority is central to my practice. I suggest that language and naming legitimizes a space of performance. It may also legitimize a space of what can or cannot be called *truth* as correctness or certainty and actively encourages multiple readings of performances legitimized by naming. It is located in a space in which we are already and always (and possibly never outside of) performing.

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It is clear (or will become clearer) that my work is founded in a manner of deconstruction. My inclination is to reduce things to their smallest parts in order to gain more understanding of them. From this position of understanding each of the smaller parts, I can rebuild the bigger picture, along with a new understanding, or way of knowing the subject matter and its changeability. As such, I must say something about Derrida, the father of deconstruction. Deconstruction is a philosophical approach more than a method, it is not a method which can be formally, universally or de-contextually elucidated. Deconstruction is performative in the fact that each time a text is repeated or read, the context changes according to that particular reader. According to Derrida Western thought (not only Western Metaphysics but also “everyday” thought and language as well) has always been structured in terms of dichotomies, or polarities: good vs. evil, being vs. nothingness, man vs. woman, life vs. death. These polarities do not however stand as independent and equal entities. The second term in each pair is considered the negative, corrupt, undesirable version of the first, a fall away from it. Derrida focuses on the Western privileging of the spoken word over the written. The spoken word is given higher value because both the speaker and listener are present to the utterance simultaneously. This immediacy seems to guarantee the notion that

in the spoken word we know what we mean, mean what we say, say what we mean, and know what we have said. Whether or not perfect understanding always occurs *in fact*, this image of perfectly self present meaning is, according to Derrida, the underlying ideal of Western culture and Derrida's project seeks to dismantle all dominant biases in order for multiple other voices to be considered and heard. (Derrida, 1972/B. Johnson/1981).

When I consider this position in relation to Benjamin's I am initially confused – that is if one reads a privileging of writing over speech as a binary inversion. Rather, Derrida is revealing the ideality of speech as conceived of by Western metaphysical logic as a more pure form of human expression. In this sense Derrida and Benjamin have similar thoughts. Derrida suggests that speech already has as much potentiality for absence as writing does, and this is also what Benjamin appears to be suggesting; that in the translation from the divine, human language reveals an absence.

At the centre of my research is a question of how lying as a concept and performative method reveals the instability of identity as construed by the ideality of fixity in image and naming, or image as naming. Instability revealed by truth as (metaphysical) correctness here becomes deconstructed by the "lie". The notion of lying here (as will be discussed further on) relates to performance, and in this way this research is also a search for an otherwise truth – a truth more adventurous. The difficulty with Derrida's position is that his desire to reject the binary value system in order to allow difference to be present, also makes it difficult to acknowledge that the belief in truth is an error without also implicitly believing in the notion of truth (Derrida, 1972/B. Johnson/1981). However, getting beyond this difficulty I believe resides in understanding Derrida as offering something more radical in the notion of "truth" ... "truth" is essentially something ungrounding, revealing in each and every moment. It does not need to stay the same in order for it be! I believe that in deconstructing language through performance, the name will be capable of housing new truths and in this sense, Derrida's aims for a more expanded notion of truth embraces the adventure of identity as difference per se. I want to deconstruct, through performance, what a name is, for example how can I deconstruct what the name Mother is, says, means, does? In doing so, my goal is for it to activate new meaning, to actively engage with the distance and difference between speech, writing and Benjamin's divine language.





Jacques Lacan's theory on desire suggests that the truth of our desire can only be possible if that desire is articulated or spoken. Lacan said that 'it is only once it is formulated, named in the presence of the other, that desire appears in the full sense of the term' (Lacan, 1988). Lacan's suggestion is that in naming the desire, the subject creates and brings forth a new presence in the world. This notion of desire acted as the starting point for my artistic practice. After four years of full time study, part time teaching, and working as a set designer, it was a hard decision to come back and do my Masters. I quite liked the idea of being at home, being a housewife, a mother, some travel. I relished the idea of taking my time to plan each meal meticulously, to get my hair done, and my nails, to do lots of baking, and have time to go to the gym during the day instead of at night. I've been married for almost 5 years and have been at university this whole time.

I decided that my artistic practice allowed me the perfect opportunity to perform these desires. I could suddenly justify my interest in cooking, and cleaning, baby-making, in gender and domestic space. I could investigate why I wear vintage dresses, and rarely pants, I could sew, and bake, by framing these activities as 'works' for my Masters research. This allowed me to think about the desires I have that have been long, or somewhat, repressed, in order to be this academic woman, that I admittedly, also love being. As such, I structured some early works around the following desires, some already achieved, others not. Some rational and possible, others not. Not all of these desires manifested in works for my artistic practice, they merely served as a starting point.

To be married

To have a child

To obtain a degree

To be as strong as a man (or at least strong enough to lift a bag of concrete)

To have spent more time with my Poppa

To have met the grandmother I'm named after

To go to Europe

To be a stay at home mother/wife

To be amazing at sewing things



My husband and I, conveniently for my research, happen to fit reasonably snugly into perceived gender stereotypes. I cook. I clean. I bake. He builds. He fixes. He mows the lawns. But, I also wield a drill and a skill saw with more finesse than any other woman I know, and my husband is known for his skill at soothing babies.

The first three works were shown during a group critique session early in the year. It comprised of two large-scale projections that were accompanied by a month long exhibition of my vintage dresses.

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Given that the act of naming a child is rooted within inhabiting and preparing a domestic space, I chose to begin my practice with a film/performance work located in the home. This work shows me spending the day cleaning, and cleaning, and cleaning, and cooking, and cooking, and cooking. Now, this isn't that abnormal, I always cook and clean the house, but I resolutely dedicated myself to the task. I did nothing else, I didn't read anything, or watch TV or do a little bit of work on other things. I cooked, and cleaned and served the man of the house. I did five loads of washing. I spent two hours cleaning the fridge, from top to bottom. I made feijoa shortcake from scratch, I made the most amazing sandwich with three meats for lunch, I made fresh squeezed orange juice, I folded, and swept, and vacuumed and mopped, and then vacuumed and mopped again. I used shake-n-vac so the house smelt good. It had been my intention to do the whole house in this manner, with a fine toothcomb, but after six hours, I was still in the kitchen, occasionally going out to the laundry, washing line, and back. I picked up the baby from day-care, gave him a snack, tidied his room, and entertained him whilst I cooked roast chicken with a Moroccan spiced lentil salad for dinner. I gave the baby dinner and a bath and put him to bed with big bear. By the end of the day, I was exhausted. Exhausted.

I made two key observations during this work. Firstly, I didn't talk much, despite not being home alone, so I felt very enclosed, I was very much *within* myself. Secondly, what I lacked in human conversation, was made up for by the machines of the domestic environment. The microwave would beep to me, to tell me something was done, the washing machine would beep and tell me it had clothes ready to be hung out, the lawn mower outside told me that it was sunny and dry enough to mow, these appliances were my acquaintances for the day. Thirdly, and for me the most astounding thing, is that I was looking down, all day, I was looking down into the sink full of dishes, I was looking down into the cutlery drawer, or the cupboards, I was looking down at the floor as I vacuumed and mopped, my entire physical expression was pointing down. Down, down, down.

My intention with this work was to explore how domestic space imprints gendered behaviour upon us. I frame my understanding of gender





Fig. 9. Emily O'Hara, Film Still, *Desire. No 8 (Wife Today/Gone Tomorrow)* #1: Cleaning the fridge.  
 Fig. 10. Emily O'Hara, Film Still, *Desire. No 8 (Wife Today/Gone Tomorrow)* #2: Greeting the man of the house.  
 Fig. 11. Emily O'Hara, Film Still, *Desire. No 8 (Wife Today/Gone Tomorrow)* #3: Retrieving the washing.  
 Fig. 12. Emily O'Hara, Photograph, *Desire. No 8 (Wife Today/Gone Tomorrow)* #1: Lunch.

performativity both through Judith Butler's writing in this area and J.L. Austin's 'How To Do Things With Words'. Using Butler's point of the role of repetition in the performance of gender, this work seemed a fertile site to begin with; the work of the house is never done, it is always and forever being repeated. In 'Jeanne Dielman 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles' filmmaker Chantal Akerman explores similar territory. We see the title character, played by Delphine Seyrig<sup>13</sup>, a widowed woman living with her son in a small apartment in Brussels. We see her studiously, quietly and seriously going about the keeping of the house. We see her preparing food for dinner, for lunch, we see her tidy and straighten, scrub dishes and the bathtub. For long periods of time this is all we see. It feels interminable, much like my day felt during this experiment. The film often reflects real-time editing, so we eat and clean and scrub with her. Slowly but surely, you begin to feel as though you were looking through one of Hitchcock's rear windows, that we may look away and return to the scene another day, another time, and see more of the same. In this way, the film echoes perfectly my sense of domestic life as an endless, always renewing task. The film supports the perception that the everyday life for the domestic woman is one of work, of solitude, of silence, of repetition. This method of repetition is intensified through the expanded duration of this film with it extending almost to four-hours in length (almost double the standard feature-film). Repetition and extended duration are both a theme and technique that I

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The same actress played the female part 'A' in 'Last Year In Marienbad'.

employed throughout my practice. The conditions of work, repetition, silence, the downward gaze and extended duration have been core concerns in both the process of making and the embodiment/installation of the made works (film, performance, objects and photographic).

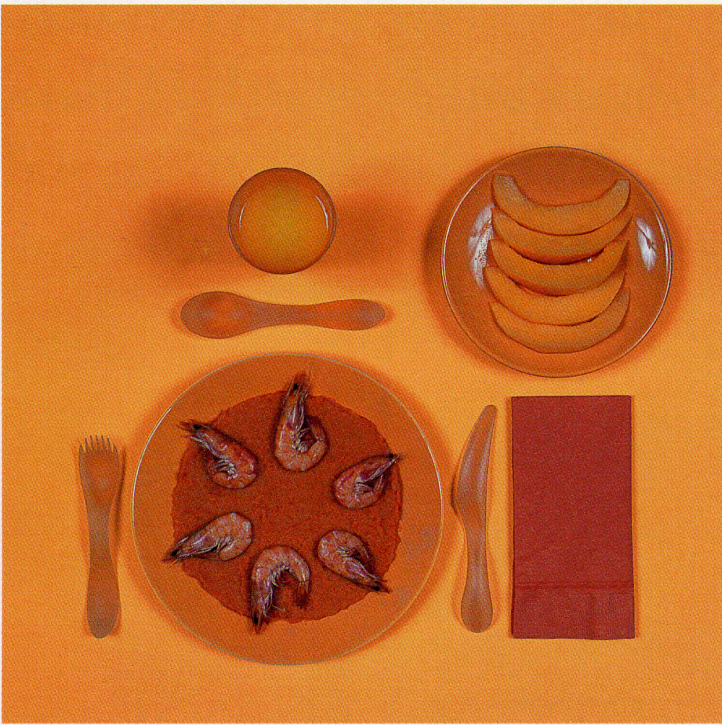
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From this sense of repetition I devised a new work. Around the same time I had been looking closely at work from French photographic artist Sophie Calle. I had come across Calle's work many times before, and was always impressed by the extraordinary detail present within many of her works. Her works that showcase her capacity to be both candid and duplicitous intrigued me. She is subject, actor, director, object, she tells stories, and continually raises questions of what constitutes an ethics of performance. In 'The Birthday Ceremony' she would invite the same number of people as years she was turning to dinner, and then keep the presents they gave her as tokens of affection. The presents would be displayed in museum like cabinets. In 'The Address Book' Calle found an address book on the street. She photocopied the contents and then returned it anonymously to its owner. She then set about contacting everyone in the phone book to try and paint a portrait of who he was according to those around him. In 'The Hotel' she got a job as a temporary chambermaid. In the course of her cleaning duties she would examine (and photograph) the personal belongings of the guests staying in her rooms (Calle, 2003). In 'Suite Venitienne' she follows strangers on the street, she secretly photographs them and then loses sight of them. By chance one evening she is introduced to a man whom she had followed that day. He reveals that he is planning a trip to Venice, and she decides to secretly follow him. She disguises herself with wig, hats, veils, sunglasses. She makes a lens attachment with a series of mirrors so that she can take photographs without aiming the camera at the subject. She documents a process of finding and losing and finding and following him. She traces where he might be based on what little information she has, and moments where they overlap she imitates and photographs him. (Calle, 1999)

Inspired by Sophie Calle, and still wanting to explore elements of domesticity I decided to create a month long exhibition of some of my vintage dresses. This work was installed in a very public display space for all staff and students of Spatial Design to encounter. I have a collection of around 100 of them, ranging in era from the 30s to the 90s, though predominantly from the 50s and 60s. I buy them, and wear them, because they suit me, and I love the way they look. Using a dress form<sup>14</sup> in place of a body, I added a dress to

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<sup>14</sup> A dress form is a three-dimensional model used for fitting clothing that is being designed or sewed. The garment can be put on the dress form in order to see the fit and drape as it would appear on the body, and then make adjustments or alterations. Dress forms come in all sizes and shapes for almost every article of clothing that can be



## MONDAY : ORANGE

Menu imposed:

*Purée of carrots*  
*Boiled prawns*  
*Cantaloupe melon*

Paul Auster forgot to mention  
drinks, so I allowed myself to complete  
his menu with:

*Orange juice*

Fig. 13. Sophie Calle, scanned from 'Double Game': Monday: Orange: A meal of only orange food on orange utensils.

the mannequin each day. Over the course of 31 days the body-figure became more and more disfigured as the dresses tacked one upon another. Along with this I also installed an information sheet (Fig. 14), detailing the date, what I had eaten the previous night, the approximate energy value of that, the bust/waist/hip measurement of each dress, and the associated bust to waist, and waist to hip ratio of each dress. The purpose of this work was a very conscious continuation of the repetition of domestic life. By bringing into extreme detail what I wear<sup>15</sup>, and what I eat, I was visually tracing the relation between food and figure. As I alluded to in my introduction, I feel haunted by the spectre of the ideal (or idealised) woman. She who cooks, cleans, is always immaculately turned out, and this spectre-woman is nowhere more easily seen and solidified (stereotyped) as perfected ideal (or ideal form) in image form than in the 50s. My decision to record not only what I ate, and the energy value of that, but also the measurements of the garment, and the subsequent disfigurement of the body-figure, was an exploration into the idea of the 'golden ratio', and the possibility for 'perfecting' one's body, in order to attract, or keep, a man. The golden ratio is when a woman's waist to hip ratio is at, or around 0.7. This is closely related to the idea of the hourglass figure, perceived by the Western world to be the most ideal female shape, though only about 8% of women have it. In his book 'The Evolution of Desire' David Russ quotes psychologist Devendra Singh in relation to men's preference for a particular body shape, or rather, ratio.

Singh discovered that waist-to-hip ratio is a powerful cue to women's attractiveness. In a dozen studies conducted by Singh, men rated the attractiveness of female figures, which varied in both their waist-to-hip ratio and their total amount of fat. Men find the average figure to be more attractive than a thin or fat figure. Regardless of the total amount of fat, however, men find women with a low waist-to-hip ratio to be the most attractive. Women with a ratio 0.70 are seen as more attractive than women with a ratio of 0.80, who in turn are seen as more attractive than women with a ratio of 0.90. Studies with line drawings and with computer-generated photographic images produced the same results. Finally, Singh's analysis of *Playboy* centerfolds and winners of beauty contests within the United States over the past thirty years confirmed the invariance of this cue. Although

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made. Dress forms in standard clothing sizes are used to make patterns, while adjustable dress forms allow garments to be tailored to fit a specific individual. They are often colloquially referred to as a *Judy* for the female form and a *James* for the male. In this case the dress form is adjustable at 23 points to reflect the body-shape of the person the garment is being made for.

<sup>15</sup> Though to be fair, the majority of these dresses were ones that no longer, or never did fit me, being too large or too small, but impossible for me to resist buying nonetheless.



DINNER	DATE
KILOJOULES Approximate energy value. kJ.	BUST/WAIST/HIP cm/    cm/    cm/  RATIO Bust/Waist Waist/Hip Ideal 0.7



Fig. 14. Emily O'Hara, digital file, *The Dresses Disfigure: the daily menu and requirements.*

Fig. 15. Emily O'Hara, Photograph, *The Dresses Disfigure: Day 1*

Fig. 16. Emily O'Hara, Photograph, *The Dresses Disfigure: Day 31*



Fig 17. Emily O'Hara, Photo Montage, *The Dresses Disfigure: Days 1 through 31*. (Figures A through  $\zeta$  travelling Left and Down, then 1 through 7 continuing to end)

both centerfolds and beauty contest winners got thinner over that period, their waist-to-hip ratio remained exactly the same at 0.70.

There is one more possible reason for the importance of waist-to-hip ratio in men's evolved preferences. Pregnancy alters this ratio dramatically. A higher ratio mimics pregnancy and therefore may render women less attractive as mates or sexual partners. A lower ratio, in turn, signals health, reproductive capacity, and lack of current pregnancy. Men's standards of female attractiveness have evolved over thousands of generations to pick up this reliable cue. (Buss, 2003)

Over the course of 31 days and 29 dresses, there were only nine that fit the golden ratio of 0.7. The breakdown was as follows:

0.4	1
0.5	1
0.6	11
0.7	9
0.8	7

This is equal to 31% of those dresses fitting into the 'golden ratio'. My interest in this ratio can perhaps be attributed to a reaction to the idea that a certain physical shape can have such an affect on the relation between men and women. Specifically that this shape was heightened through the 50s and 60s through the style of dress, and what this means for us today, when research shows that the female shape has changed, with women now taller, and with a bigger bust and hips than the 1950s woman. By placing these dresses one on top of the other, I was actively seeking to disfigure the shape of the body. I realise in hindsight, that I could have also measured the figure after the dress was added each day. This would have given some data (other than a visual record) of how the figure changed over the duration of the work, however the visual record is sufficient to see the disfigurement of the body-figure. I would also like to have a record of the body-figure from the side, not only the front, to show the change in shape from this angle.

It is also interesting to note that the body-figure seemed to traverse the pattern of change that a female body undergoes in a lifetime. Beginning as a reasonably straight and narrow (Pre-Pubescent: Fig. a) shape, slowly and gently filling out (Teenage: Fig. c), bust and hips becoming fuller and fuller (Maiden: Fig. k), then the figure starts to look heavier, though still shapely (Mother: Fig. v) and finally, the figure begins to lose shape and definition, the hips and bust flatten out, the waist is no longer narrow, and there is little shape to the figure, from the front or the side (Crone: Fig. 7). Overall the installation worked through a notion of how one of the most stereotyped ideals and ideals of stereotyping unhinged itself through the physical demands and mutations of

its conditionality (the dresses). That is, this was a performative display of how the weight of a stereotype in the ideal of both dress and time (1950s) deformed via repetition in as much the same way as Akerman's filmic denouement. That is, Akerman's housewife "breaks-down" in the last few minutes of the film, disrupting her everyday cycle through the violent act of killing a man. The pressure of ideals always gives way to new ground.

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The second film projection showed a clip of my Poppa in the late fifties, early sixties, at his house in Putaruru. My Poppa, Harry, died when I was 12. He was an engineer, and he left Britain with his wife and children when my father was very young, moving first to South Africa, and then settling in New Zealand. My intention in showing this short clip alongside the other works was to acknowledge how my memories of him disrupt my total descent into assigned gender roles and behaviour. As a young girl, no more than 3 or 4, I would go and stay with my paternal grandparents, with my older brother, and my Poppa would teach me how to use tools properly, how to plane, and saw, and drill, how to melt and bend Perspex. He was resolutely determined that a woman (he also taught my mother how to use tools whilst my parents were still married) should be capable of doing things without a man, his bravery only extended so far however. I distinctly remember a car trip with my brother, during which we got a flat tyre. I wanted to help change it, only to be told to sit on the kerb. I don't know his reason for this, it could perhaps have been that he felt it was inappropriate for me to be seen doing this in public, it could have been that I was (as was invariably the case) wearing a very pretty dress that he didn't want to get dirty, or simply that it was on the side of a busy road and he wanted to keep me safe.



Fig. 18. Emily O'Hara, *Film Still, Desire No. 5 (Poppa): My poppa in front of his house in Putaruru.*





Fig. 19. Emily O'Hara, *Photograph, Desire No. 2 (The Happy Accident) #1.*



Fig. 20. Emily O'Hara, *Photograph, Desire No. 2 (The Happy Accident) #2: Reuben Sinclair Moffett.*

Still focussed on acting out desires, I wanted to spend some time with the Grandmother after whom I am named. In an effort to force some kind of communion with her, I decided to visit her grave with a pack of cigarettes and a bottle of sherry<sup>16</sup>. I don't drink sherry, and I don't smoke. In the vein of forcing some kind of spiritual encounter, partaking in both of these things to excess was the mode through which I was trying to force a connection.

I had my mother drive me to her grave in Mangere Lawn Cemetery, her plot is unmarked and without a headstone, so I needed my mother there not only to drive me home, but also to locate the site of her resting place. Once there, I sat on her grave, and followed my plan to smoke and drink until something happened. It took two and a half cigarettes and three small glasses of sherry, then I spewed.

The use of smoke to commune with spirits has a long history. In 'Spirit Animals and the Wheel of Life' Hal Zina Bennett outlines the practice of smudging<sup>17</sup> as a means of weakening the veil between the space of everyday life, and something other than that.

The smudging ceremony has been used as far back as we can find records in human history. Versions of the same basic principles have been found worldwide, and in every tradition from Celtic to Roman Catholic. It is a way to create a space for new knowledge and change... Undoubtedly the most important principle is that smudging is like drawing a curtain between everyday life and this moment. In smudging we are saying, I acknowledge that, at this very moment, I am entering a different space than my everyday life. (Bennett, 2000)

There is a link here between the practice of smudging and photography. Photography expands time and space in the way that smudging seeks to. Photographs allows us to find union with, or commune with the dead through a relation between the Spectrum/Spectator. The spectrum (subject) references the future Spectator through the future-present implication inherent in photography. A photograph also expands the role of the Operator in that our inability to say for *certain* who the Operator was in the past-present, allows us to believe that *we* are now the Operator, that we are witnessing the same moment that was captured through the lens of the camera. Not only does a photograph

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<sup>16</sup> She was known for her love of Rothman's Menthol cigarettes, which you can no longer buy (I went with Pall Mall instead) and a good sweet sherry, the bottle of which was later stripped of its label and used as a prop in my design for Othello.

<sup>17</sup> Smudging (burning herbs, leaves, plants, incense etc) has historically been used to cleanse negative energy, to bring about visions through the sense of smell. In ancient Greece, smudging formed part of the rituals to contact the dead, following long periods of fasting and silence. Their sacred smoke was born out of sulphur and minerals in lieu of herbs to part the veil between the worlds of the living and form a bridge to the other world.



Fig. 21. Emily O'Hara, Film Still, *Desire No. 6 (Smoke Until I Spew)* #1: Lighting a cigarette.  
 Fig. 22. Emily O'Hara, Film Still, *Desire No. 6 (Smoke Until I Spew)* #2: Sitting on the grave as the sun sets.

exist for the past-present-future, but we also act as the referent for Operator/Spectrum/Spectator. Barthes' suggests often that photographs contain the imperious sign of a future death. He says that if he likes a photograph, if it 'disturbs him', he lingers over it. The photographs that disturb are those in which we find some reflection of our imaged identity. The prick he talks of is the recognition of some eidolon in the image that presents *us*. This is how we are simultaneously the Operator, the Spectrum and the Spectator.

As the cigarettes burned, I sat, mostly silent, and for split seconds, I felt some kind of connection. More than anything, during my time in this space, I felt as though I was not only *in* my body experiencing the revulsion of smoking, but also *outside* of *my* body, able to see myself sitting on the earth. I could view the scene like an architectural section, in which I saw myself active above a large depth of soil, finally beneath which lay the still remains of my grandmother, looking up at me. I felt again, that I was looking down, that all my intention to connect, had to be focussed downward — As in the case of repetitive housework that performed my body as the 'downward' gesture akin to death. Or perhaps, death was beckoning toward a future unknown.

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As an aside, a series of uncanny events occurred during the winter months that I couldn't ignore, but never quite came to a conclusion (or certainly not at the time of writing this). I was house sitting (and cat minding) at a house in Ponsonby, Auckland. After my first night in the house, I woke, fed and played with the cats, and then left for an appointment. When I returned an hour or two later, I returned to a lounge strewn with dark feathers on cream carpet, and the fresh corpse of a very large bird, perhaps a thrush. I don't entirely know why, but I trimmed the top from a tissue box, placed the bird inside, and put it in the freezer. A day or so later, I found a half drunk glass of red wine that a friend had left on the front porch. I almost immediately emptied it into the sink, but stopped when I realised it was full, *full*, of tiny fruit flies, some dead, some swimming around and presumably all drunk. I don't entirely know why, but I decided to film it (see Fig. 23 for a film still from Dead Dead Wine). I think I was wondering how long it would take them all to die (it took longer than my camera had life...I emptied it into the sink before they were all dead). Not long after that, I was in Avondale having a meeting about another show I was to design in December. I was sitting on the carpet drinking green tea, when the dog of one of the men I was meeting with caught a bird. I'm not entirely sure why, but I asked if I could have it. He popped it into an old Chinese food container, and I took it home and placed it into the tissue box with the other bird. Once I returned to my own home in West Auckland, my own little cat gifted to me the skull of a bird, and a few days later a mostly eaten sparrow. These also went into the tissue box in my freezer, which had now travelled from

Ponsonby to Glen Eden.

It took some time for me to assign a reason why these dying, flying creatures were coming my way. The relationship between my Grandmother after whom I am named, and the (step) Grandmother who has been mine, and alive, for my entire life, is bound with the death of my Grandfather, as the man they were both married to. I remembered at some moment I cannot recall, a story that my grandmother Ellen told after my grandfather passed away. She said that they had spoken about death many times. My grandfather believed he would be reincarnated, and wanted to return as a bird. Perhaps as a joke, perhaps not, he one day said to her that if he died before her (as was likely given his health) he would return in the form of a strange red bird, and visit her. At this point, I should say about my living grandmother (I suppose step-grandmother to be technical, but I don't want to be) that she is an extraordinary artist, with a particular penchant for birds. She has studied them all her life, and it is another mark of her considerable intelligence that she knows what species they are by sight. Some time after his death, she sat smoking at the table, which overlooks their small garden. She saw a strange red bird sitting atop the fence, she started and stared and thought she'd never seen a bird like this before. She recalled what my Grandfather had said, she dismissed it by walking up to the letterbox, the bird followed and chirped until her attention was given, locked eyes and stared, and then flew away, never to be seen again.

I'm not sure what more I can say about this, other than the birds are still in my freezer and I don't entirely know why, but I can't get rid of them. Perhaps, at the formal conclusion of this body of research (the submission of the thesis and subsequent examination) I will bury them.

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During the months of June and July I was contracted to design the set and costumes for a production of Shakespeare's 'Othello' with Peach Theatre Company. I have worked with this theatre company several times, and was fortunate to be working with some exceptional people in their field on this project. The show was conceived by Jesse Peach as a highly experimental interpretation of an extremely traditional play. Large sections of the script were expressed through physical movement rather than verbal communication. These physical movements (in some cases dance, in others not) were choreographed by Douglas Wright<sup>18</sup>. The music for the show was

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<sup>18</sup> Born in Tuakau, South Auckland in 1956, Douglas danced with Limbs Dance Company of New Zealand (1980-1983), the Paul Taylor Company of New York (1983-87) and DV8 Physical Theatre of London (1988) before forming the Douglas Wright Dance Company in Auckland in 1989.

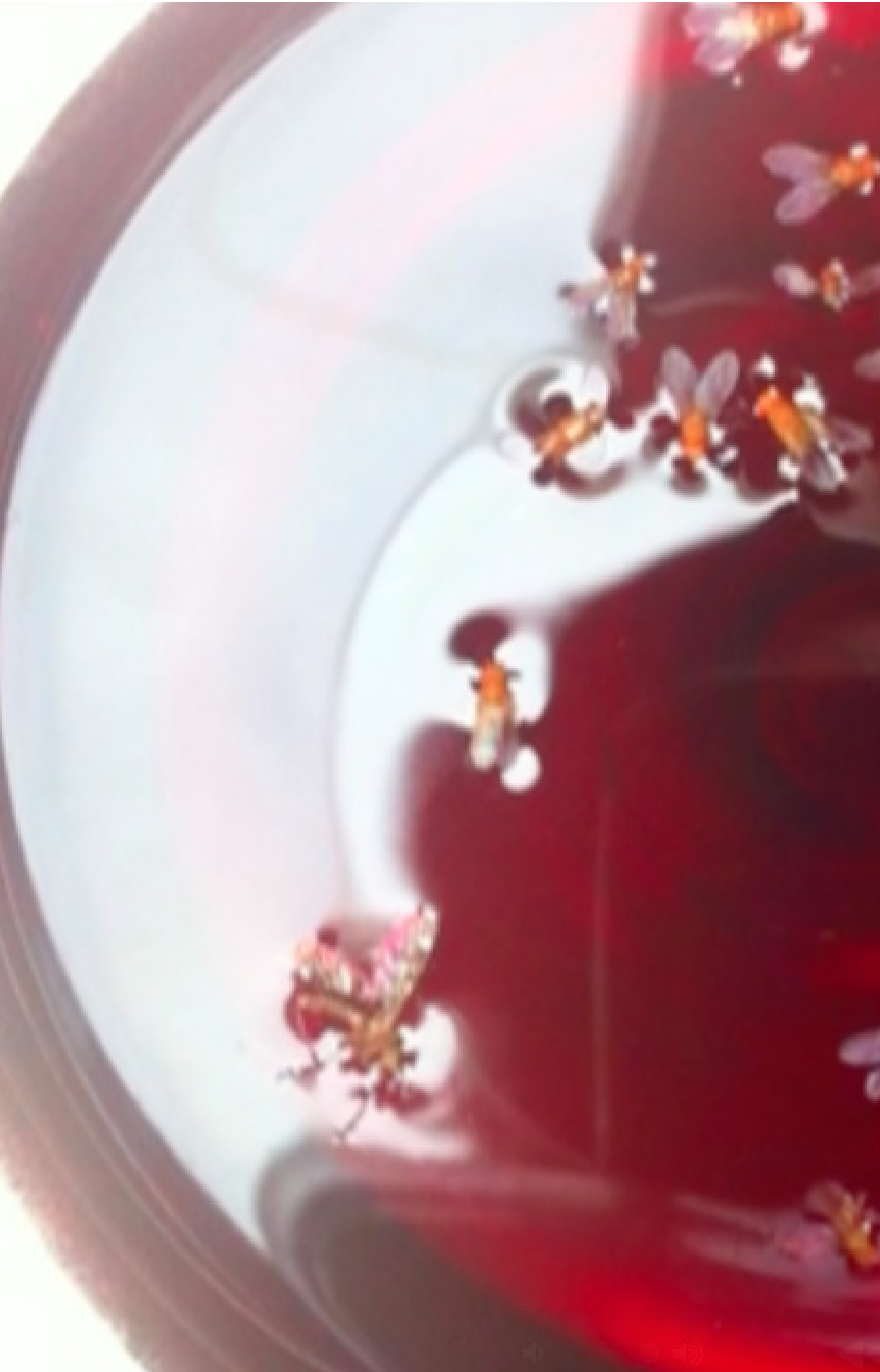




Fig. 23. Emily O'Hara, Film Still, *Dead Dead Wine #1*: fruit flies drowning in wine.

written by Gareth Farr<sup>19</sup>. Rather than detail the design process as such, what I would like to share here seems at first, slightly out of joint with the practice thus far.

Around the same time I was invited to participate in a film making workshop with Canadian film maker Solomon Nagler<sup>20</sup>, he works with 16mm film, and hand develops his work in order to preserve control over the process of film making.

Along with ten other people, (from a range of disciplines within Art & Design at AUT) I spent a glorious 10 days immersed in an entirely new mode of craft. This workshop was very much about the kind of craft Hiroshi Sugimoto refers to, the craft of film loading, light conditions, chemical processes and patience above all else. Nagler's approach to teaching<sup>21</sup> was at first alarming, he is very relaxed about the process, almost to the point of seeming to not care. Initially, I found this somewhat frustrating, but as the days went by, I realised this is the best way to approach this kind of experimental filmmaking. There are, inevitably, times when it just doesn't work, you load the film wrong, or the light meter is incorrect, it's over or under exposed, the chemicals are too old... the process itself, in every single part, forces you to be patient, and to expect surprises, both good and bad. The process itself embodied the conceptual question around predetermined knowledge and further, it actively engaged a condition of contingency that produced unexpected results. The image in this way 'lied' in the sense of adventure that I have spoken of earlier.

I am always rushing. I always have a lot of things to do. I pride myself on being quite efficient, and working very quickly. Because of this, I often say yes to many (amazing and wonderful) things, because I know I'll find a way to fit it all in. This film workshop offered an absolute and total break from that mind set, both in the sense that it was so consuming that I was unable to do anything else at the time, and in the sense that it has broken my habit of doing lots of things at once. It really slowed me down. The goal of the workshop was for

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19 In 1993, at the age of 25, Farr was appointed composer-in-residence by Chamber Music New Zealand, the youngest-ever composer to hold that position. This resulted in the composition of three substantial works, *Owhiro* (String Quartet No. 1), *Kebyar Moncar* (for gamelan) and the chamber sextet *Cadenza*. At the conclusion of the residence, Farr returned to the Eastman School to begin a doctorate in composition.

20 Nagler is a professor of film production at Nova Scotia College of Art & Design (NSCAD). His films have played across Canada, in the U.S., Europe and Asia at venues such the Centre Pompidou (Paris), L'Université Paris Panthéon Sorbonne and Lincoln Center in New York. His work has been featured in Retrospectives at the Winnipeg Cinematheque in August of 2004, at the Excentris Cinema in Montreal in August of 2007, the Festival De Le Cinéma Different in Paris in December 2005 and 2007, The Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers and The Canadian Film Institute in 2009.

21 Alongside AUT staff members Andrew Denton and Nova Paul, both of whom are also experienced, knowledgeable and generous in their teaching of this area.



the participants to share our film work in a public gallery at the end of the 10 days. This 10 day period involved learning some history of 16mm film making, current practitioners, viewing some of Nagler's works. Nagler showed us once how to load the film into the Bolex camera, how to test light conditions, how to remove the film safely and then sent us off in small groups to shoot some footage, and figure out any issues within those groups.

All of this was interesting, but it was not until we entered the dark room to process the film that the magic really happened for me. I have never studied photography, have never been allowed into the sacrosanct (Platonic photographer's) cave<sup>22</sup> which is a dark room. Nagler again showed us (only once, and with dead film) how to load the film reel into a Morse developing tank, how to add the chemicals, the relevant processing time and how to dry the film. Nagler left us in the innermost recess of the darkroom cave, and sat outside in case we ran into trouble. There were five of us in that room, five bodies, five distinct strangers. The lights went off, and something happened to me. I don't know if it happened for the others, they've all been in a darkroom before. The film we were using is not safe under red light, so it must be loaded into the tank in absolutely darkness, and it is not an easy task. The tank is smaller, the reels are smaller still, and the film is 50 feet long, all of which must be wound back and forth multiple times during the processing. At first there is silence, and then the sound of small metallic clinks, of muttered frustration, finally assurance that it's done, and then hesitation as you realise that there is all kinds of deaths waiting in the darkness. If the light comes on too soon, the film is dead. If the lid is not properly shut, the film is dead. If it's not properly wound, it's dead. If the end leader is not secure, it's dead. Finally, after some ten or fifteen minutes, the light-tight tank lid is on, and lights are switched back on. As the light returns, I realise that in the darkness something occurred. There is a kind of intimacy of sharing the dark with people, the dark is where we sleep, where we make love, where we are vulnerable. And so, we die as strangers when the dark descends, and with the light we are reborn as friends.

As the days pass, and I spend more time in the darkroom, something else occurs to me. The darkroom echoes the spatial and physical (imagined) conditions of death (or of the body once dead). It is dark. You cannot move. You are trapped. Your eyes could be open or closed, you can't see either way.

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22 For further reading please see Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave'. This has been an important text for a philosophical theoretical insight into the 'birth' of photography in relation to representation. Plato's Cave is an allegory about the trap of metaphysical certainty as valued by notions of light and presence. Jacques Derrida and Susan Sontag (and many others) have written about the implication or significance of it in relation to photography. Derrida complicates it by signalling that multiple truths exist beyond the simple binary of what is inside the cave and what is outside. Further the shadows in the cave are signifiers of representation; in believing in these shadows the myth/allegory reveals the seduction of image as reality. For Derrida's reading here please see: 'The Double Session' from *Disseminations*. (Derrida, J. (1981). *Dissemination* (B. Johnson, Trans.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. (1972))

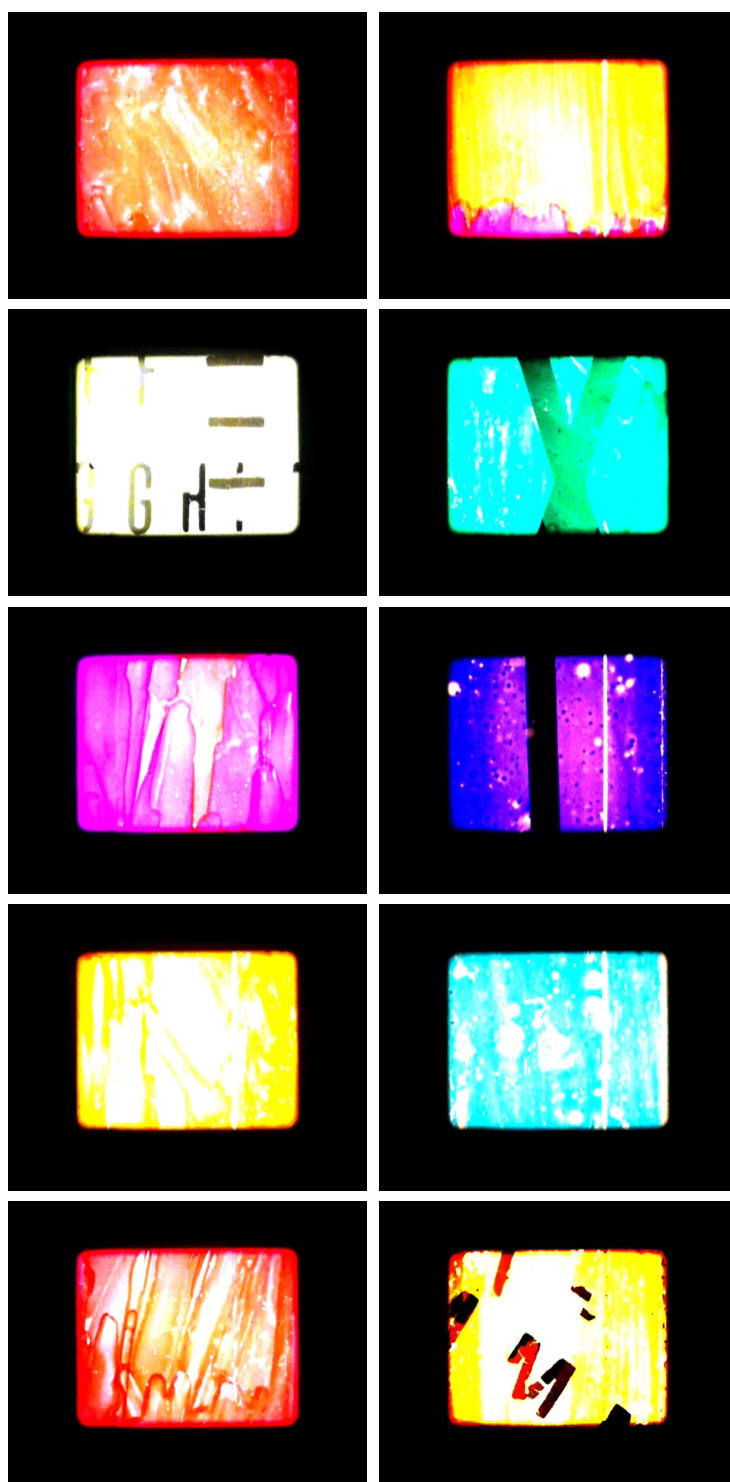


Fig. 24. *Emily O'Hara, Film Stills, 16mm #1: Various stills from moments in the film, reproduced digitally via filming the projected film reel.*



Fig. 25. Emily O'Hara, *Film Stills*, 16mm #2: *I only have one letter of my own.*  
Fig. 26. Emily O'Hara, *Film Stills*, 16mm #3: *"Your name what?" in New Zealand Sign Language.*

This is the ultimate paradox, to imagine the spatial and physical conditions of death, this is instead what death would feel like, but only to the living. This is not the experience of death for the dead. Time disappears in the darkroom, it's something like cat years and human years. One hour in the darkroom is five hours in the world outside. This aspect of time being out of joint continues for me through the rest of the process. I spend literally hours and hours at a time, without moving, eating, drinking, hunched over a light box. I inspect each frame of the film. I paint and draw and scratch, colour and cut and edit the film in the manner of Len Lye and others. I move back and forth between the light box and the projector, which also takes a long time to turn on, install the film reels and play through, then rewind and repeat in order to see the film again. I fall in love with the way this craft absorbs me. It has been a long time since I have been this focussed on one thing at a time. This expanded time or time out of joint references the spectrum quality of photography as the agent of another time, another world, another history that permeates our everyday *but* without quite ever knowing when it might appear. This was the quality of being in the cave – as though immersed in the photograph itself.

The content of the film was circumstantial, and intuitive but the process evidently not. My final piece offered a breakthrough point of connection to my previous practice. The camera we used was unable to record sound, so I used sign language to ask repeatedly “Your name what?”<sup>23</sup>. This question of naming was always present in my research, as I have detailed. The breakthrough came as I started to compare my name to my grandmother’s even further. Between Emily and Emmeline, we share the majority of the letters. The only letter I have of my own is Y, and the only letter she has of her own is N. (Interestingly the only letter that I share with my mother is Y, and she shares N with her mother and Y with me). My mothers name acts as a bridge between my Grandmother’s and mine<sup>24</sup>.

E M M E L I N E

K A T H R Y N

E M I L Y

The connection between the 16mm film workshop and the production of Othello is this: I was so enamoured with this new craft that I purchased some film making tools. I bought a Super8 Video Camera, and a Super8 projector. In some kind of divine accident, the man who sold me the Super8 Video

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23 In NZ Sign Language (the third official language next to English and Maori), the syntax of sentences changes dramatically, “What is your name?” becomes “Your name what?”. I studied NZ Sign Language at a night class for several years after high school.

24 To take this further many of the film and photographic material/artefacts that mediate my relation to my Grandmother, Emmeline, is through my Mother as the Operator.

Camera sent me instead, an Agfa Synchro Box Camera from the 1950s. I was distraught, and delighted. I later found another Super8 Video Camera, and decided to keep the Box camera also.

Shakespeare's 'Othello' is all about death given the series of lies that construct the play's web of deception and jealousy leading to the drama's tragic events of numerous deaths. Out of a desire to use the camera I decided to use it to capture the moments on stage when death/killing is enacted, or spoken about. From the upper balcony, I experimented with the box camera. Medium format film is between 8 – 12 shots, depending on brand. Though flash capable, my Synchro Box doesn't have a flash (not that I could have used it during the performance in any case), and the ability to focus at distance is dubious. I have no light meter, so used my intuition to determine how long to leave the shutter open. I had no idea if the camera even worked. As I took the images it was clear to me that they may never exist anywhere other than in my mind. I had the film developed, and during the 24 hours it took I tried to tell myself that it probably hadn't worked to avoid disappointment. I was delighted to see that the negatives had picked up some images after all. I was reminded again that there is life and death in a negative, that once used, the potentiality of its life as another image is dead. You can of course, make double exposures, but that is just piling death upon death. If each image is akin to a death, then each subsequent exposure is not bringing new life, but rather a new death, until eventually the blackness of the film (which here represents its life) is over exposed into total whiteness (here representing the ultimate death).

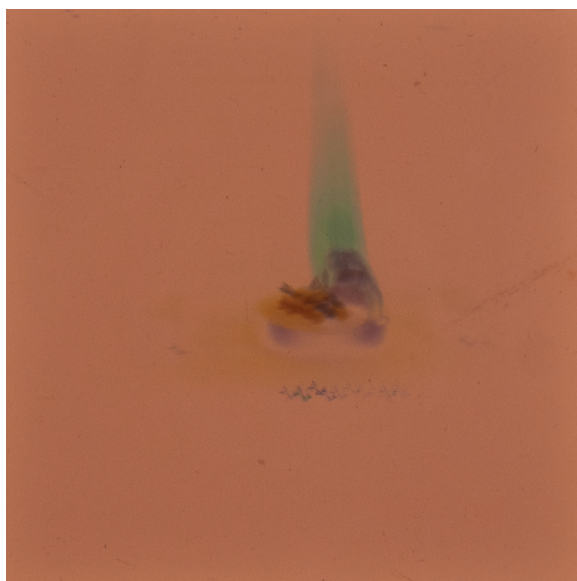


Fig 27. Emily O'Hara, *Medium Format Negative, Othello #3*

At the conclusion of Othello and the 16mm Film Workshop my focus returned to this body of research, and at this point my practice left acting out the previously named desires as an active engagement behind, and entered new territory. Wanting to continue working with film and negatives I began reconsidering the slides which I found all those years ago. I asked my mother if she had any other items which might help develop my knowing of my grandmother. She gave me a box of things, inside which were passports, birth certificate, marriage certificate, a series of letter and postcards, and a few personal items.

Upon opening one of the passports, I was struck by the photograph of her. I recalled immediately Roland Barthes' quest to find an image of his mother that captured her essence, her air, the truth of her. He was seeking a photograph in which he *recognized* her. Having never, in life, met my Grandmother I had thought it would be impossible to *recognize* her in a photograph, yet there was something about it that struck me. It *spoke* to me. When we look at a photo, we are never seeing the authentic person<sup>25</sup> (not even the representation of their authenticity) so we can never know someone through a photograph of them. But yet, when I look into the eyes of some photographs, they are more knowable in that moment. Perhaps it has something to do with the lens as a portal? There is an art of looking *at* the lens of the camera, or looking *through* it that determines the presence, and perhaps sense of authenticity of a portrait. Those who look *at* the lens are dead, these are the flat images that you pass by without feeling, they don't *speak*. One who looks *through* the lens is *waiting* for the gaze of the other, while the photograph is happening they know it will come. They are looking back at the Spectator, from the past, knowing that you are looking upon them from the future.

I still could not identify why I recognized her in this image however. Perhaps, it also has to do with the time of my own looking? Are we not the apparatus of capture in the re-imaging of the photograph once developed? I doctored the passport image of her, with the image from my own passport, and the recognition was immediately obvious, I had finally recognized in my grandmother, *my* mother. Ordinarily you would combine the mother's face with the grandmother's, to end up at the face of the grandchild, but in this case, it is the combination of grandmother and grandchild that place my mother in the boundary position. Time is forced out of joint, by combining my own image (diluted by my father's genetic traits) with her's, my mother's face was revealed.

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25 Barthes' says he suffers from a sensation of inauthenticity in front of the lens. He is simultaneously the one he thinks he is, the one others think he is, the one the photographer thinks he is and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. Because of this, and the ensuing sense of inauthenticity he experiences a micro-version of death, he is becoming a spectre, because he cannot authentically present himself, as he is straddling a position between subject and object.





Fig. 28. *Emily O'Hara, Hybrid #1: Scan of grandmothers passport photograph.*  
 Fig. 29. *Emily O'Hara, Hybrid #2: Replacing my grandmother with myself.*  
 Fig. 30. *Emily O'Hara, Hybrid #3: Combining our faces results in an image of my mother.*  
 Fig. 31. *Bobby Neel Adams, Photographs, Family Tree*

As a result of my experience in the cemetery with my grandmother's grave in Desire No. 6, I found myself thinking about several things. Firstly, I was captured by the fact that her grave is unmarked, with no headstone to signify her presence below ground. Secondly, I felt there was a connection between my extreme domestic experience in Desire No. 8 (Wife Today/Gone Tomorrow) and Desire No. 6 (Smoke Until I Spew), in both pieces, I felt my physical and mental attention and energy was attuned downward. Lastly, I was considering the relationship between the domestic space we inhabit daily, and how this might metaphorically relate to the space we inhabit in death; the coffin. This idea of the coffin as an extension of life's domestic space continued into thinking of the duration of our life being an extension of this coffin space – life is an occupation of a larger coffin. We are always on our way to dying...I also began considering the spatial relation between those who die, and those who live. Why are the dead not buried where they fall?<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Around this time I happened to go for a walk through Waikumete Cemetery, which is quite close to where I live. It is a massive, sprawling cemetery in West Auckland.

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It was established in 1886, and houses a diverse range of denominational and cultural groups. It is one of the largest cemeteries in the Southern Hemisphere with 70,000 people laid to rest there. (Auckland-City-Council, 2011). Cemeteries are simultaneously densely and sparsely inhabited, full of dead bodies, barren of live bodies, for the most part. While walking around the cemetery one morning, I had quite an extreme reaction as I was passing through one area of the grounds. I entered from the East corner, and walked my way along through several areas of well kept grounds, well preserved headstones, and worked my way further into the cemetery. As I did so, I noticed that the headstones had older and older markings on them, they were cracked, falling, tilting, listing in the way of things that have been there for some time, but still the grounds were well kept, tidy and easy to manoeuvre through. Suddenly, it changes. The grass is long, and the graves and headstones are absolutely unkempt, with very old dates. There is no one looking after this section of the cemetery it seems, or very barely in any case. After a few minutes of walking through, I sat down on the edge of a grave and wept. I felt so utterly destroyed in that moment that we relegate the dead to such a separated space from the living. I felt heart broken at how lonely they must be. There are so many people buried there, they have been there for so long now that perhaps no one knows they are there. I don't understand how we disrespect our ancestors in this way. How is it possible that it means so little to us to know where our kin are buried? Those graves, though inhabited by those long since dead, are still a link in the chain of someone's family history, they are the perhaps several times great-uncle, aunt, father, mother, cousin of someone who is living *now*. I thought, what if someone from my family is buried here and I don't know? Who holds the responsibility to visit with the dead? I don't know where any of my ancestors are buried, other than my grandmother at Mangere Bridge Cemetery. I began to think fantastical thoughts about how this disconnection that I perceived could be remedied. I thought wonderful thoughts about family crypts in which all families dig down to the centre of the earth, and each person carves out their own crypt room, one below the other, year after year after year, so that the oldest ancestors in our family are living closest to the space the living inhabit. One could descend into the earth and walk down endless flights of stairs and trace the names of those who had been before. But of course, this is problematic on many levels. Most importantly in this case, the question of what constitutes a family is central. The complex web of what a family is, and who belongs to which family is impossible to untangle, and we only have one body to bury (or one body to burn). Imagine this; a girl is born to one mother and one father, she is in their family. She marries a man at 22, and takes his family name, they are now a family. He dies, and she remarries, again changing her name. Where should she now be buried? With the family that bore her into this world, or is she the new starting point for a family line of the children she will bear into this world? So she disappears from the history of her birth family (those who came before her) in order to maintain the history of her own family. All this is impossible, nonsensical, and so I realise now, that perhaps the name is that which houses the long since dead. Is this how we are meant to maintain a connection with our ancestors? But this too, seems inadequate to me. Names change, and the name which classifies us as a product of our ancestors is not our first or second name, but our family name, or surname. Perhaps what we need to do is rethink the way we name children in the way of the Romans. The *praenomen* was the given first name. In 100 BC there were only about 18 known to be commonly used. The gentile second name, or *nomen*, referred to the *gens*, or clan, of the child's family. The *cognomen* was the third name given the newborn, referring to the family branch. This was originally utilized as a nickname (e.g., Scipio *Africanus*, in reference to his conquest of Hannibal at Zama). It's complicated though, because part of me is arguing that you can't be anything other than a manifestation of the person you were named after (if you are named after someone specific) but the other part of me thinks this is the right way to do it in order to honour those who have been before you, because they also are such a huge part of how we get our identity. The challenge/disruption seems to stem from women. Men's names seldom change, it is women's names changing where the breakdown occurs, and so the Roman way seems clever, that you are from





Fig. 32. René Magritte, *David's Madame Recamier*, 1950, representation of painting

The digression of my visit to the cemetery (detailed in footnote 26) coincided with a social encounter where a friend asked what I would have written on my own headstone<sup>27</sup>. As a result of this, and my visit to my grandmother's unmarked grave I began crafting a series of scale headstones, with varying inscriptions. The Headstones served as a way of marking out, prescribing, inscribing and describing some of the relations on naming that I had uncovered. I was also trying to find points of meaning between definable parameters that Lyndy and I both had (names and dates). This exercise also uncovered a series of physical conditions that are implied by burial. It bought new meaning to my desire to use the *lie* as a way of recontextualising the space of performance.

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your father's name, and then you adopt your husbands also, but then the kids follow the father's name...I think I'm getting somewhere and then it hits me that it's so complex, it's impossible to honour everyone who came before. There would need to be some kind of statute perhaps. The logic of the system is contaminated by women, and by the fact that we come from two parents, with different names, if we were always to honour both names, each subsequent generation of children would end up with more and more names. But at the end of all this, I come to something perhaps useful for future research: Your name is/as your history. Your name is/as their future. The family name as/is the crypt which houses the dead. Sexual difference is the condition for contaminating the Dead Patronym with the live Matronym.

27 At the time I said I would have "I'm standing right behind you!" as my headstone inscription.



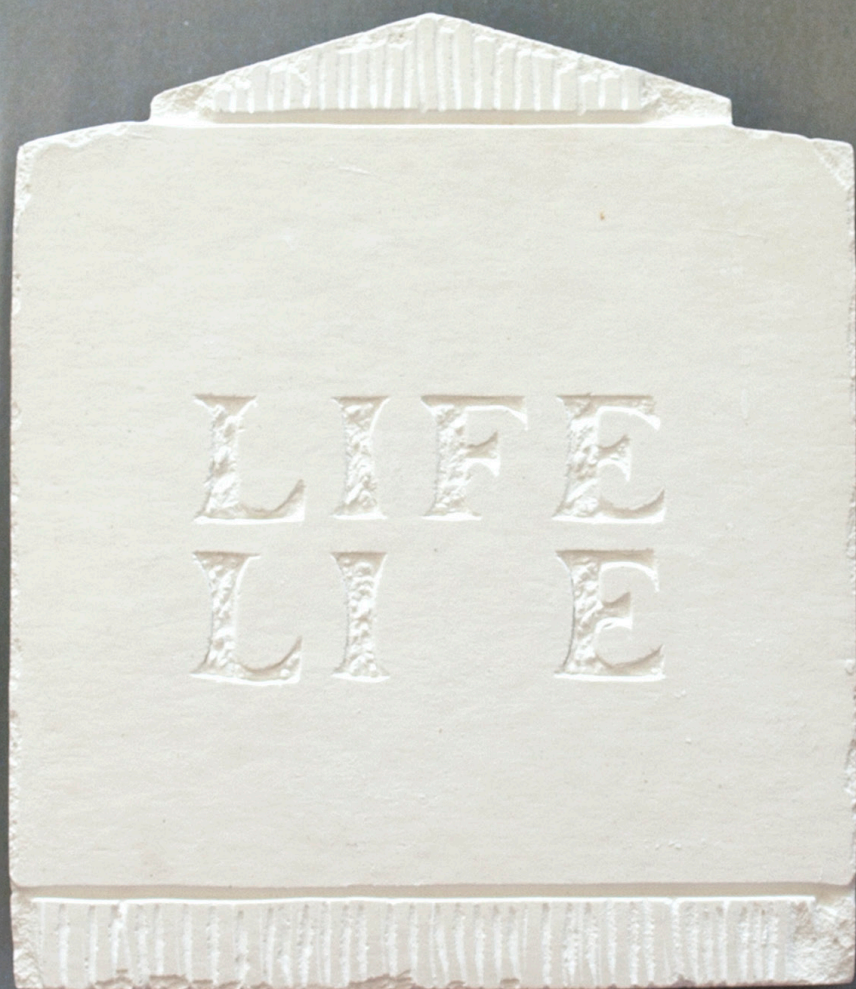


Fig. 33.  
Fig. 34.

Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #1: A play on words, indicating the life now lies below.

Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #2: N, the only letter my grandmother has of her own, and the year of her birth.









Fig. 35. Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #3: Y, the only letter I have of my own, and the year of my birth.  
Fig. 36. Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #4: Rearranging letters, indicating the body veiled by death, by earth.









Fig. 37.  
Fig. 38.

Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #5: A statement, a question, and an answer.

Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #6: Y, again the only letter I have of my own, it also becomes a question when spoken.









Fig. 39. Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #7: Significant dates, the year of her death, my birth, her birth, my mothers birth, the year I was named.

Fig. 40. Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #8: Another reference to the letter Y.









Fig. 41. Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #9: The combination of the shared letters in our name, in order, uncannily, it seems to spell out a name I am called by a friend.

Fig. 42. Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #10: An indication of a person, a statement, the year of my birth, and the current year.



HERE LIES

Y

1984 - 2011





Fig. 43. Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #11: Burying my self, burying a performance.  
Fig. 44. Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #12: Do we live in death?









Fig. 45. Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #13: The number of years I would have left to live if I died at the same age as Lyndy.  
Fig. 46. Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #14: This refers to the only letter I do not share with my grandmothers name.



I ONLY HAVE  
ONE LETTER  
OF MY OWN



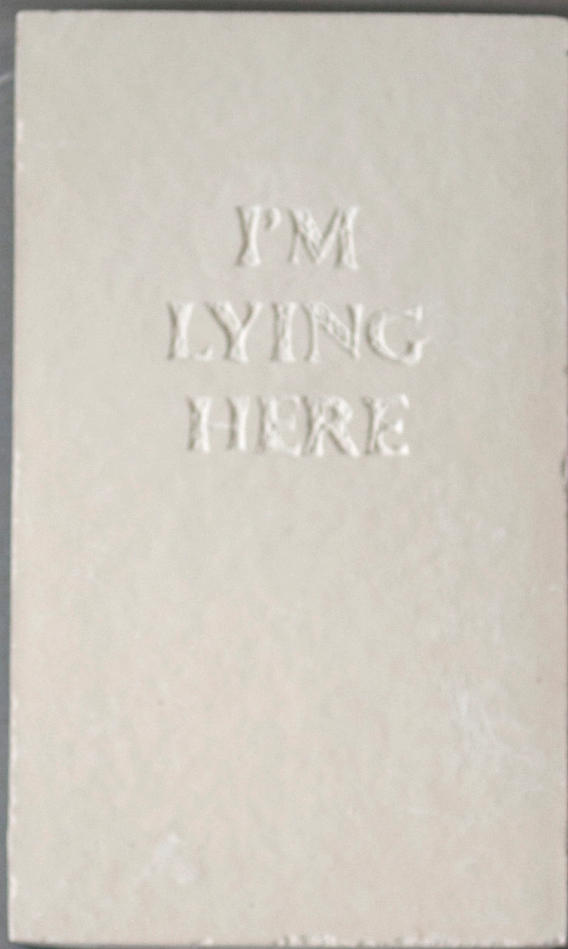


Fig. 47. Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #15: Burying the self.

Fig. 48. Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #16: A play on words, suggesting we lie in death, you cannot not lie in death.



IT'S A MATTER  
OF LIFE OR DEATH

Immanuel Kant believed that telling a lie, even a white lie, was a violation of one's dignity. His work links lying and morality, suggesting as per common perception, that lying is *wrong* and the truth is *right*. It is easy however to locate points at which this polarised position of truth/untruth and right/wrong is not so plausible, or can certainly be tested. In 'Without Alibi' Derrida calls upon Nietzsche, Kant, Plato and more to give a 'History of the Lie'. He refers to Nietzsche's text 'The History of the Error' and states that a lie is not an error.

One can be in error or mistaken without trying to deceive and therefore without lying. It is true however, that lying, deceiving, and being mistaken are all three included in the category of the pseudological. In Greek *pseudos* can mean lie as well as falsehood, cunning, or mistake, and deception or fraud as well as poetic invention, which increases the possible misunderstanding about what a misunderstanding may mean... (Derrida, 2002, p.29-30)

This ground between error, the lie, cunning, fraud and poetic invention leads me at last, to the point where a confession must happen, in order to fully disclose the breadth of my practice over the course of the year. Four of my works could be said to be a lie, or involve lying. At this point, it is possible to return briefly to some of the works that I have already outlined, and see within them a deeper meaning. The lie was a method through which I sought to bring attention to the role of the name, and the consideration of how naming affects identity in each capacity; how naming has the power to define and control.

The first is in Desire No.8 (Wife Today/Gone Tomorrow). You see me cleaning a house, washing clothes, cooking for a man. I confess, that is not my house, they are not my clothes, he is not my husband. This work was the beginning of a deconstruction of not only the domestic space, but also the proper of domestic relationships. The house belongs to my friends John and Jen, I spent the day cooking and cleaning *their* domestic space.

The second is in Desire No. 5 (Poppa). You see a film clip of my Poppa Harry, in front of a house, waving and walking away. I confess, that is not my Poppa, and that is not his house in Patararu. I asked my husband Simon to

stand in place of my Poppa. The reason I asked Simon to take on this role was two fold. Firstly he shares one of my Poppa's most memorable traits, he can build anything, the inner workings of things are under his command, he can fix anything. Secondly, he has taken up the teaching where my Poppa left off. If not for the two of them, I would not be able to proudly say that I am incredibly skilled ("for a woman") with tools and building things.

The third is in the Headstones described in the previous section. The inscriptions take on new meaning with each of these confessions. During the year, I manifested not only the above performances that had elements of lying within them, but also a much larger performance, which could be construed as a lie. As such, I was constantly aware of this perceived act of lying, and as such was playing with the language found in each context through testing variations of it on the Headstones. I was drawing a comparison to the inert body *lying* beneath the earth in a coffin, and to the act of *lying*, that performance which I was perpetrating daily. Do we lie in death? Physically? Metaphorically? Actually? Or is death or knowledge of our mortality an ontological condition of lying? That is, is a lie inaugurated through conditions of our mortal being? These objects were a subtle clue to anyone looking that there was more to my practice than met the eye.

My fourth and final confession, relates to Desire No.2 (The Happy Accident). You see a photograph of me heavily pregnant, and a photograph of what is presumably the child of that pregnancy. I confess, I have never been pregnant, and Reuben is not my child. The 'truth' of Desire No. 2 (The Happy Accident) is that it is a year long performance work that began as the result of an assumption made by another person. Ultimately the conditionality of desire (according to psychoanalysis) resides in the fantasy relation or space of the imaginary of not knowing. What Lacan call's the drive of desire made manifest through his concept of the *Objet petit 'a'* — an illusory object ('a') of desire that we always go after, passing from one object to another. The *petit 'a'* (or small object) is the condition of desire as it is non-existent or not real but produces or manifest the conditionality of desire. Desire is never able to be satisfied and hence a continuous drive — insatiable and ongoing. Desire is frustrated (but also fuelled) by its lack of satisfaction and at this point ruptures into fantasy as an (imaged) outlet. The image or re-presentation as in naming is often, in Psychoanalysis' terms, that which gives (temporary) release via its fantasy condition to Desire's unattainable constancy.<sup>28</sup>

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During one of the first weeks of the year, the Honours and Masters students

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28 For further reading see 'The Seminar of Jacques Lacan' (particularly Bk. 1 'Freud's Papers on Technique' 1953 – 1954)



were tasked with presenting their research interests to the postgraduate cohort. At this point, I had not formally framed my research intentions for the year, yet implicitly had concerns in the region of gender, identity and performance. Yet I was still stuck on my very real desire to have eschewed another year of study in favour of staying at home, keeping house and husband, I wanted to fall pregnant and become a mother. However, I *had* decided to return to university. That desire was unable to be fulfilled at that point, and so, I brought to the discussion that day, some photographs. The first, of me heavily pregnant, was taken last year when I wrote and acted in a monologue series with local playwright Thomas Sainsbury<sup>29</sup>. The other photos were of my close friend John, and his son Reuben. I chose these images to share as Reuben has in some ways, been a surrogate son for me. My husband and I spend a lot of time with John, his wife Jen, and Reuben<sup>30</sup>. My husband and I are named as his legal

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29 This was undertaken as part of my practice within my Honours research – while I am not an actor, I used this process as a site for exploration within the realm of traditional theatre and performance. The space between commercial and artistic performance has been an ongoing question for me and my body has also often been employed in my artistic performance art as is common in the field of performance studies.

30 It's uncanny really, the similarities between my husband Simon and I, and our friends John and Jen. Simon and I met John at a mutual friends birthday party years ago. Simon and I fell in love with John, and vice versa, and decided to invite him to our wedding, which was in a few months time. I can't remember now if we even saw him again between that night and our wedding, but to our wedding he came, and we've been firm friends ever since. He started seeing Jen a few years ago, and they fell pregnant accidentally (Reuben!). During this time, I didn't see much of them, we really liked John, but seemed only to see him at things arranged by other people, where we would somehow end up drinking and singing songs with a guitar in a bedroom/lounge/kitchen. Simon is the youngest of 6 kids, and his 4 sisters and one brother have 10 kids between them already. I was 12 when my younger brother was born, and helped to take care of him a lot. We spend a lot of time with babies and parents. I guess we just offered to take care of Reuben as often as we could, and John and Jen felt safe leaving him with us. We spent lazy afternoons at their house with cups of tea, and as Reuben got older and started sleeping through the night, the afternoons turned into boozy Friday nights with dinner and conversations. We quite often find ourselves at John and Jen's on a Friday night, eating takeaways and drinking wine. We sometimes stay in the spare room and drink tea and play with Reuben in the morning. Neither John nor Jen's parents live in Auckland, and I've always been aware of trying to give them a sense of support, to make sure they know that when they are having a tough day with Reuben and need some time out they can call us, at any time of the day or night, and we will come. During these Friday night conversations, we uncovered all these uncanny details, and the temperaments and habits of each of us became apparent. Simon and John are born in the same year, in the same month, 21 days apart on September 6<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> respectively. Jen and I are born in the same month, 25 days apart of February 2<sup>nd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> respectively. These dates make John a Virgo, Simon a Libra, Jen an Aquarian and me Pisces. According to astrology, Jen's Aquarius nature would be better suited to Simon's Libra, and my Pisces nature would be better suited to John's Virgo. We often joke about how John and I are better suited/more similar than our actual partners, and vice versa, that Simon and Jen have strong similarities, but we all agree that we'd murder the other within a week. Or more likely, John and I would murder each other, whilst Jen and Simon would slowly die because neither of them would go grocery shopping. Something else that's uncanny about the dynamic between the four of us, is that John



Fig. 49. Emily O'Hara, *Photographs, Desire No. 2 (The Happy Accident)*, Emily O'Hara, John Moffett and Reuben Sinclair Moffett.

guardians, John and Jen want us to raise him if anything should happen to them. I did not intentionally exclude Jen from these photographs, and neither was it my intention for the images to be read in the way they were by the group, but her exclusion from the images is what perhaps allowed the group to read the photographs in the way they did. The photographs performed as evidence to a certain truth. To return once again to Roland Barthes, he talks in the last pages of his book about photographs being both evidential and exclamative<sup>31</sup>. He goes on to say that they are *certain*, that they provide evidence to a thing having been real, a photograph authenticates that the Scriptum has existed in 'flesh and blood' (even the inanimate objects), and whilst this is true, it is also not. All a photograph authenticates (and provides evidence of) is a physical presence, it does not authenticate what you may read in the image, it does not account for our capacity to *name* the thing we see as *something else*. For example, the photograph shows that I am in a house, and I am pregnant. The photograph of the child, when placed next to the first photograph, one would fairly assume, represents the child that came from that pregnancy. But it is not, I have never been pregnant, and the child, though much beloved, is not my biological off

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and I are the 'female' in the relationships, whilst Jen and Simon both fill the 'male' role if we look at things from a stereotypical point of view of gender roles, particularly in domestic situations, which is where we encounter each other most often.

<sup>31</sup> A photograph may have the capacity to say both "that has been" and "there she is".

spring, Barthes' assertion that a photo attests to identification of reality ("that-has-been") is true. I did stand in that space, in front of the camera, at that time, but the reality of that moment does not continue to the reality (realness) of the pregnancy. One could argue however, that the photograph *is* truthful in a future tense (as I may one day be pregnant) and is a foreshadowing of that, (as in my idea that photographs inscribe identity onto us) but it will also always be true in that photo that I was performing being pregnant.

I never did present my research interests to the group that day, we ran out of time to hear everyone speak. At a quiet point during someone else's presentation, one of the new students, looking at the photos, said to me "Is he yours...?" and I affirmed, that he was indeed mine. Partially out of confusion, partly because I didn't want to explain further while someone else was presenting their work, and primarily because I know a performance opportunity when I see one. Though I was sharing those photos as a way of saying, *I cannot yet become a mother, but I am sometimes a mother to this child*, the moment in which the viewer asked if he was mine created a performance space that I had never imagined.

From this point, I would at any opportunity, bring Reuben to visit at the University. He came with me to openings, to exhibitions; we popped in and out of the studio together on our way to do other things. My intention was to continue this performance without a script, without rehearsal. I would simply take chances to share my relationship with Reuben with other people – and see how far their assumptions would carry the performance.

It may be becoming clear at this point that my initial examination on naming, which arrived through a question of my own name, has also always contained a questioning of the names that I performed in this particular work. I initially had firm intentions that I would not actively lie, by which I mean that I would not volunteer information that was not 'the truth', but rather that I would let the *other* do the lying, or the performing, on my behalf. I had particular strategies about how to answer questions that fed into my underlying intention that this performance work would act as a deconstruction of language, as a means to encourage people to question their own perception about relationships that are based on naming (Mother, Son etc). I used the belief that the other had in the 'truth' of the photographic evidence (that I was a mother) to legitimise and activate the space of the performance. I refer here to J.L. Austin's assertion that for a performative utterance to be successful both the context and authority must be correct to the situation. Yet as a deconstructive act my performances here revealed that the notion of authority is with the reader / spectator. Derrida suggests that it is the reader who signs the text/work (Derrida, 1985)<sup>32</sup>. And further, reading Austin via deconstruction, the

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32 Please refer to Derrida's text 'The Ear of The Other'. (Derrida, J. *The Ear of the Other: Otobiographies, Transference*, Translation, ed. by Christie McDonald (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1985) pp. 163-186

notion of authority/author in relation to context is that we are never outside of context and the degree of 'correctness' here in my performance deconstructs the notion of truth as correctness (or certainty for sure). If a child and woman are presented (or re-presented) as a couple, multiple contexts assume that the 'correct' relation is mother and child. The truth under contestation therefore is: Why in our societies does this bias reside so simply, so naturally? The Western dominance of the Nuclear family ideal is still the 'correct' normalized coding. Yet, we need to ask: How successful is this for the reality of today and futures of psycho-cultural-social relations? My relation to Reuben testifies to another successful expanded notion of being a mother, with a child and in a family.

There are four significant moments within the scope of this year long performance and its integration with the rest of my practical work.

The Porte Cochere

The Wet Lab

The Hospital

The Bunker

During each of these occasions I wrote a Recollection. These recollections provide details of exchanges with other people in various spaces. These text based Recollections now act as documentation that the performance occurred, they are 'images' that show the work. I suggest that you read these recollections as they are presented to you, in the same way you have viewed the other images in connection with the text around them in the rest of this document.

One of the first things that became apparent as I performed this work, was that my distinction between lying by omission, and actively lying, became irrelevant. I gloriously engaged with furthering this performance at any chance. I will point out however, that none of the information I shared about Reuben, or my interaction with him, was made up. All of the details I shared about favourite foods, when he was unwell, cranky, teething, happy, when he learnt to kick a ball, if I was picking him up from day-care...all of these details are from my own experience with him. My husband and I lived at John and Jen's house with Reuben whilst they were on their honeymoon, we actively parented him for that time.





Fig 50. Emily O'Hara, Photograph, Recollection: The Porte Cochere #1: Talking to Brent.



The Porte Cochere is a lobby space at street level in the Spatial Design Building. It is periodically used to show work in progress, and there is a program of events through the year that activate the space. In this instance, the Porte Cochere was initiating the new Honours students into Spatial Design as they presented their abstracts and ongoing work for formal evaluation. I will point out at this moment that there were several people who were aware of what was happening, two fellow masters students, and a few of the Spatial Design staff who had reason to be acquainted with more of my personal life than others, by way of a closer teaching relationship.

Friday 25th March, 2011

I picked Reuben up from John's house on Webber St in Grey Lynn. They had just been out to Pakuranga to pick up some fabric for Bridesmaids dresses for their wedding in May. Reuben screamed the whole way to Pakuranga, but calmed down on the way back. I didn't take him out of the car; I just left him in his seat, grabbed some shoes and headed back to Uni. We parked in Mount St, and I paid for parking whilst Reuben stayed in the car. I had given him my iPhone to play with when we left the house. He loves looking at the photos and videos, especially ones of himself, or of my cat Minx. As soon as I put my handbag on the seat next to him, he points to the pocket where he knows my phone lives, and almost says "Hm?" (he's still learning his words). With the parking ticket firmly ensconced on the front dashboard, Reuben and I head inside, jogging through the light rain and moderate wind, he loves this! Giggles and smiles and asks for more (I taught him sign language for 'more' some time ago). We arrive inside the Porte Cochere, where Mark and Maria are setting up a video projector, they say hello to Reuben (Maria later reveals she almost instinctively says the Reuben has 'my eyes'), and we head upstairs to the post grad studio on level 4. Several of the new Honours students are inside, Pritika, Brendan, Amy as well as Benita and Rachel. Rachel immediately says 'You've got a bubba!', I give her a hug and quickly remind her of my performance. Reuben and I head towards my desk at the back of the room, but get waylaid by Brendan, who asks if he is mine (I simply say, "This is Reuben.") and how old he is ("He turned one last November" I say). As I make my way to my desk to change him, I can hear Brendan begin to talk about his little boy. Reuben makes fast work attacking things around my desk, playing with the chains and locks on my lockers, picking up needles...I find some dry pants in and change him. We play for a little while longer and then head back down to the Porte Cochere, I feel like I'm unable to settle anywhere properly, I'm aware of this subterfuge and want to limit the circumstances where

I might have to actively lie. I spend some time talking to Mark and Maria again, and float up and downstairs a few more times. At one point, I am on level five, in the staff room, Matthew Von Sturmer and Fleur Palmer are in there, Matthew is eating something I think. Reuben stands on the edge of the table and Matthew asks me how old he is (you know this answer by now) and starts to tell me about his kids, his older daughter, and a younger child, I was unable to pay close attention as I could feel Fleur's eyes on me and my lie. I go back downstairs with Reuben standing on his own in the elevator, I hold his hand up to the wall so that he can feel the machine rumble as we move, he runs out of the lift into a crowd of people, immediately turns back towards me and motions to be picked up. I've asked a fellow student to take some photos of the evening in order to provide proof of my attendance at the event with Reuben, she does this under the guise of documenting the Porte Cochere for our end of year magazine. I am standing holding Reuben when two of my first year students come past, they stop, seeming stunned that I have a child on my hip, and immediately coo over him, they think he is adorable, they ask who he is ("This is Reuben" I say) how old he is, ("He turned one last November" I say). One of them tell me that he has my eyes. I feel uncomfortable. I deflect the conversation to them, we talk for a short while about their own studio work before they head off. The Porte Cochere has begun to fill up now, and the next thing I remember is encountering Albert Refiti with Reuben on my hip (he doesn't want to get down yet). Albert asks if he is mine, again I say "This is Reuben". Albert looks at me, eyebrows raised so high I think they are going to fly off his forehead, and asks again if he is mine. (It had been my intention to tell all the Spatial Staff the details of my project, but I didn't have time). I am at a crossroads. I cannot reasonably explain to him now the context of my performance, as we are surrounded by people who already believe he is 'mine'. So, I say yes. Albert asks how old he is. I say again, that he turned one last November. Albert does the maths (I curse again my distinct lack of mathematical skills) and suggests I must have been heavily pregnant at the end of my third year. I acquiesce. By this time Fleur Palmer's interest seems to have been piqued, and she says I 'did a Peggy' referring to a character in *Mad Men* who carried a full term pregnancy without alerting anyone. I suggest that I just got a bit fat (for the first time I am somewhat grateful for the weight I put on during the last two years and the size of my breasts, they must always appear ample for breastfeeding). Fleur again says that I must have been heavily pregnant, and seems surprised that she didn't notice. I am non-committal. Albert turns the conversation towards Reuben's habits, asking me what his father does (I describe John's event company, as well as his role at South Pacific Pictures) and Albert wants to know who looks after Reuben during the day, or does he go to Day-Care. I confirm he goes to Day-Care a minimum of three days a week, sometimes more depending on what his Dad (John) has happening with his work. Albert probes further. He wants to know which Day-Care he attends. I suspect he suspects me. I cannot remember the name of Reuben's Day-Care centre, but I have been there once (when I was transferring some velvet curtains to John's car whilst we were working on an event together, John and Jen and Reuben had been swimming that morning) and I remember that one of the reasons why they picked this Day-Care was because of the big lovely Samoan woman that works there, and the fact that the children have their own cot at nap time. I describe to Albert where he goes ("The one at the top of Richmond Rd, along Surrey Crescent) he asks me if it's any good, I confirm that it is, that Reuben loves it, especially painting (I know this from conversations with John and Jen) and that he is just starting to make friends there. Albert seems satisfied, I take this chance to get Reuben a piece of cheese (one of his favourites) and make my escape. I float around for awhile, giving Reuben cheese alternated with crackers...he likes to share his cheese with me, I happily accept a half masticated mess of cheese from his grubby fingers into my mouth. Is this what it means to be a parent? (I remember one day, watching Jen as she sat on the green carpet in the lounge, picking the green hull off some strawberries and giving the red flesh to Reuben to eat, she then popped the hulls in her mouth, chewed and swallowed, I must have

looked surprised, because she told me that she'd rather just eat them than have to get up to go to the bin). Old friend and fellow student Jessica Mentis is here, and she plays along with Reuben, with her and I having been such close and public friends, it must appear as if she has known Reuben all along, I refer to her as Auntie Jess, Reuben immediately falls in love with her, I teach Jess how to 'Zing', (you hold out your index finger and say "Zzzzzzing!") and Reuben will touch his index finger to yours.) We are standing talking, when Anita Barry appears (a fellow Honours student and friend from last year) I quickly gather her into a hug and whisper the gist of the performance into her ear, she looks intrigued, but agrees without question. Maria indicates that the Honours students will present their abstracts to the group, and we congregate around Brendan's work to begin, Reuben is totally comfortable in the space now, and wanders around a bit. I pick him up, not wanting him to distract anyone (I secretly do want him to distract things a little bit, I pick him up to claim him, so that it is clear he is with me). What ensues was so brilliant that it could have been scripted. Reuben is snugly with me, I hold him close to my chest, and he strokes my face, gently touches my earrings, rubs my hair, picks up strands of it and lets them fall, touches my face some more, puts his fingers in my mouth, gives me a kiss and finally starts to wriggle as Brendan finishes speaking. I take him towards the bar area that has been set up and give him some more cheese whilst Pritika is talking, he wanders around the room, all the way to the back of the studio. He spies a water bottle on the sink. God only knows how long it has been there, I find him a plastic cup instead and give him some water to drink. Whilst standing quietly away from the group, one of my theory students from last year, Lindsay Renfrew, says she can't believe I have a baby. She says he is so cute, and again, mentions that he has my eyes, and says he looks like me with his blonde hair (I can't recall, but I must have told the tutorial group at some point that my raven black hair comes straight from a bottle every five weeks, and that I am actually blonde) I say thank you. Lindsay exclaims that now she knows why I was 'so good with them last year', that it was because I'd just had a baby, and they were all babies too. As Amy Yalland presents her research I notice the time, it's just after five. Reuben's night time routine normally starts at about six (dinner, bath, bed with big bear). I would normally be very keen to hang around, and be one of the last people to leave, I'd help tidy up, remove rubbish, pack up leftovers, but this time, all my focus is on Reuben. I don't care about having a glass of wine, or what chance I may have to converse with someone, I just want to make sure Reuben is home in time to have a good dinner, enjoy his bath, and get to sleep. We go upstairs together in the lift, and gather up Reuben's things (and mine) and make our good-byes downstairs. I think Mark Jackson takes great pleasure in this subterfuge (I recall a time I wandered past he and Maria meeting with someone in the Post Graduate Studio, I had no child with me, not even sure if anyone else was in the room, and he asked me how my little one was) I like this about Mark. Maria plays it more low key – she's not surprised to see me with him, no need to make special mention of it, though she remembers she has a book for me and we return to her office to get it (Derrida's 'Without Alibi'). One more trip in the lift, goodbye to Auntie Jess outside, I strap Reuben into his car seat, tighten the straps and we drive home.



Fig. 51. Emily O'Hara, Photograph, Recollection: The Porte Cochere #2: Talking to Brendan.  
 Fig. 52. Emily O'Hara, Photograph, Recollection: The Porte Cochere #3: Talking to Mark.  
 Fig. 53. Emily O'Hara, Photograph, Recollection: The Porte Cochere #4: Talking to Albert and Fleur.





Fig 54. Emily O'Hara, Photograph, Recollection: The Porte Cochere #5: Talking to Nicola and Rachel.

I was working with some of my first year studio students in the wet lab. I was talking with two students, one female, one male, as they released their plaster models from their cardboard confines. We were musing on the impact the models would have in the Porte Cochere exhibition planned for later in the brief, I said I was 'going to bring the little one along' in passing, and wandered off to talk with another student. As I walked away, I overheard the girl tell the boy that my son was "so cute" and that he has "has Emily's eyes". The male seems stunned, incredulous, says to female "She has a baby?!" This is affirmed by her. The male now turns to me, incredulous still, and says "Are you a Mum Emily? Have you got a baby? Oh man...."

His reaction astounded me, it was like I could see his perception of me changing, right in front of me (Maria said...maybe he was in love). He talks about his Mum frequently, with great respect, perhaps this is significant? I certainly feel a connection. Who ever knows what people are thinking of us in their own time? They run away with the information we give them, and make up their own stories and ways of identifying with me. I wonder why his reaction astounded me. I have had several very engaging conversations with these particular students, they are older than the average student in first year, and they have shared aspects of their personal lives with me. In another context I think we would have been friends. I feel that the performance seems somehow more insidious, more hurtful, more like a lie with them. I feel that you don't lie to your friends, but my lack of this feeling with others indicates that it's ok to lie to strangers?

It's so ingrained in me to not lie, that I feel surprised by how easily these lies slip from my tongue. It's immoral. It's naughty. It's wrong to lie. Isn't it? But is this lying? Or performing? I keep thinking about how they will feel, how they may judge me, when they find out the truth. The truth in all its loaded glory. There is no truth here. From a teaching perspective, what allows me to continue is the fact that a work of this nature will be a wonderful way of helping them to test their own boundaries of what is, and isn't deemed inappropriate in their own design careers.

The next significant moment was a result of a brief encounter, but revealed how this performance was bigger than I imagined, and had the capacity to exist for longer than I thought possible. After the encounter in The Wet Lab, I spent days thinking about it. Finally, I realised what was niggling in the back of my mind. I had conceived of this as a performance with a start, and end. I believed (until this moment) that I could ‘finish’ this performance piece. I realised, after this exchange, that I can’t. What if they never find out? There is no guarantee that they will come to the event during which I plan to reveal the ‘truth’, they may never find out that I do not (yet) have a son. They might go for the rest of their lives thinking that I have a gorgeous blonde haired, blue eyed kid called Rueben. This lie might follow me around for the rest of my life, out of my control, out of my hands. Or not even follow me, it will follow them around, this untruth that will be baked into their memories of me, this apparently integral piece of information, that I am a mother, that I have a son, that this means something about me, that it contributes to their perception and understanding of me, or my character, of how they relate to me, of the extra respect I seem to now be given, it may well forever be a part of how they recall me. This condition of doubt or concern for the other’s ‘truth’ is potentially also the otherness residing in myself, alive in the future as the desire for a child increases.

In the birth of a lie a death of a truth seems self evident, but the lie is also a continuous re-birthing, as it takes on a life of its own, and spreads beyond my control, so this performance now happens off-stage so to speak. The lie can continue to function (to breathe, to grow, to change) outside of my immediately spatiality. The lie does not require me (or does it?) in order to stay alive, it merely needs me to give birth to it (it is quite possible that people are engaged in conversations about ‘my son’ at any given time without my knowledge). Why this fascinates me is that an intangible, unquantifiable action (performance of the lie) now places me in new spatial locations, it invites me into spaces with other people, without me physically being there.

Concealing/revealing, like life and death, truth/lie *appear* to operate as a polarity but none of these things operate discreetly, in every death there is



a moment of birth, in the concealment of something, you are revealing something else; that you cannot/do not/will not tell the 'truth'. Even life and death are no longer able to be understood as binary terms, photographs give us our immortality, memories that others have of us bring us to 'life'.<sup>33</sup>

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33 *I was captured by several of David Eagleman's vignettes on the afterlife in his book 'Sum: Forty tales from the afterlives'. The following is one story that had particular resonance for how name continues to perform, even in our death. It was also used as part of a live performance test in Gallery 3 that will be outlined later.*

There are three deaths. The first is when the body ceases to function. The second is when the body is consigned to the grave. The third is that moment, sometime in the future, when your name is spoken for the last time. So you wait in this lobby until the third death. There are long tables with coffee, tea, and cookies; you can help yourself. There are people here from all around the world, and with a little effort you can strike up convivial small talk. Just be aware that your conversation may be interrupted at any moment by the callers, who broadcast your new friend's name to indicate that there will never again be another remembrance of him by anyone on the Earth. Your friend slumps, face like a shattered and reglued plate, saddened even though the Callers tell him kindly that he's off to a better place. No one knows where that better place is or what it offers, because no one exiting through that door has returned to tell us. Tragically, many people leave just as their loved ones arrive, since the loved ones were the only ones doing the remembering. We all wag our heads at that typical timing. The whole place looks like an infinite airport waiting area. There are many famous people from the history books here. If you get bored, you can strike out in any given direction, past aisles and aisles of seats. After many days of walking, you'll start to notice that people look different, and you'll hear the tones of foreign languages. People congregate among their own kind, and one sees the spontaneous emergence of territories that mirror the pattern on the surface of the planet: With the exception of the oceans, you're traversing a map of the Earth. There are no time zones here. No one sleeps, even though they mostly wish they could. The place is evenly lit by fluorescent lights. Not everyone is sad when the Callers enter the room and shout out the next list of names. On the contrary, some people beg and plead, prostrating themselves at the Callers' feet. These are generally the folks who have been here a long time, too long, especially for those who are remembered for unfair reasons. For example, take the farmer over there, who drowned in a small river 200 years ago. Now his farm is the site of a small college, and the tour guides each week tell his story. So he's stuck and he's miserable. The more his story is told, the more the details drift. He is utterly alienated from his name; it is no longer identical with him, but continues to bind. The cheerless woman across the way is praised as a saint, even though the roads in her heart were complicated. The grey-haired man at the vending machine was lionized as a war hero, then demonized as a war lord, and finally canonized a necessary firebrand between two moments in history. He waits with aching heart for his statues to fall. And that is the curse of this room: since we live in the heads of those who remember us, we lose control of our lives and become who they want us to be.



My friend Antonia recently returned from Sydney, and a few friends went to her house in Kingsland for dinner, and to watch a travel segment she had filmed in Australia some months ago. On our way there, I messaged Jen, to see if she was coming, to which she replied that Reuben was not feeling well and she would likely stay home with him. On arrival at Antonia's, we opened some wine, ate some chips, and John, Jen and Reuben arrived with our friend Max, who is a doctor, and currently living in Nelson with his wife. He came up to Auckland to take part in a course on how to deal with motorcycle accidents in the E.R. We watched the show, and then four of us left for the Ponsonby food court to pick up dinner. When we returned to Antonia's house, we were met by Lily telling us that we had better get inside as Reuben had split his lip. No worries, we thought, a minor injury, luckily we had also picked up ice cream, that would soothe him. On going inside, we see a blood soaked tea towel, a bloody and screaming child, a pale and shaking Jen, and a worried looking Antonia. He fell whilst playing, and smacked his face on the edge of a pot plant. He put his teeth right through his bottom lip. Max suggested ice, and that we coerce him into letting us have a look, Jen cannot participate in the holding still of her screaming child. Over John's knee Max holds Reuben's head still and pulls his lip up, quickly releases it and in his best bedside manner, tells John that he needs to get Reuben to starship hospital immediately as it will need stitches, and they will probably do it under ketamine.

Simon drives John, Jen, Reuben and I to starship hospital, the waiting room emptier than I've ever seen it we only have to wait for about two and a half hours. John, Jen and I take turns holding Reuben (who is now asleep) on our laps. Whilst he is on my lap Jen says she does not want to go in to see the doctor, as if they have to do stitches she may faint/cry/spew, so I go in with John instead. In the consult room, the doctor tries to have a look at Reuben's lip and screaming ensues. The doctor says it looks like a cut just to the outside. John counters that our doctor friend Max looked before the swelling got as bad as it was by that point, and that it goes right through. The doctor says he cannot look at it properly with Reuben screaming, so talks about giving him some laughing gas in order to get a proper look and potentially stitch it up. Whilst talking about this, the doctor looks at me and says "I don't know if you remember having gas when you had him, but it's really....". John and I both interrupt, laughing, to say I'm not the mother (apparently being a woman in proximity to a baby in this situation is enough for him to assume he was mine, curiously, I could have been any other legitimate woman in his life, sister, baby sitter, nanny, cousin, friend, mistress....). We take Reuben into another room where he is given gas, and the doctor has a decent look and says that it does go right through his lip. He calls the consulting surgeon, who comes down to talk to us. Jen comes into the room, tries to leave as the doctor comes in (John asks her

to stay). I think I recall the doctor being confused as to who the mother was. The surgeon tries to have a look, and Reuben wont let him, so he says it will need to happen tomorrow morning under a general anesthetic (they cant use ketamine as some patients move their head around when under ketamine, which would make stitching up a lip difficult). We leave the hospital and take John and Jen home, and return to our house in west Auckland around 2.30am.

I wake up at 7am to return to the hospital with coffee and food for John and Jen. Whilst waiting for Reuben's turn to go into surgery, I was walking with him down the hall to look at some fish in a tank, when I bumped into the surgeon from the previous night. He stops me and begins talking about what will happen in the surgery, I stop him to remind him that I am not Reuben's mother, and that we should go back to his room where they are waiting, the surgeon says that's not needed, that I can just tell them, and then tells me I look different from the previous night. An awkward moment happens, where he talks to me about how I look different, my hair being up last night, and down and loose the next day. I'm not sure what the relevance of this is to him. It seems oddly inappropriate and mildly flirtatious to me. Perhaps he is intrigued who this woman who is not the child's mother is, and why she is the one with him, and if I'm not the mother of this child, perhaps I can be the mother of his.

This year-long work also offered chances to continue to deconstruct the proper of family. In the Recollection from *The Hospital* this is apparent. The events allowed me to step into Jen's place of mother and wife. That we have the luxury to be able to do so is delightful and in this situation, necessary. I also took on the role of mother to both John and Jen in the absence of their own parents (because of death in one case, and geographical proximity in the others). There is, in our tongue in cheek conversations about how I should be with John and Jen should be with Simon, an undoing of any sense of threat or betrayal that could come up through our communal parenting (a living of some idyllic fantasy, that we have also long joked about). The very fact that we have openly (though who knows how seriously) talked about the kind of relationship we would have if I was with John and Jen was with Simon, immediately negates any sense of threat or betrayal, as we have lived the reality of it through performing it with our words, our conversations.

That I was able to step into Jen's place, is not an attempt to *take* her place, but rather it signals that I am able to give to John, Reuben and Jen, what they needed in that moment. The fact is, that whilst I step into the mother role many times with Reuben, I am not his full time mother, and with that comes perhaps an ability to distance myself ever so slightly from his pain, his terror, his fear, in a way that Jen would not be able to, in a way that John is not able to. I will have to wait until I have my own child to see how I would react in this situation<sup>34</sup>.

John and I, being so similar, speak the same 'language', and so perhaps I

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34 I'm frustrated by my own language barriers here. There seems to be a contradiction. I'm frustrated by own belief that I can obviously still have my 'own' child. Because Reuben *is* mine. But he is also not. It has something to do with duration and time perhaps. That when you are the full time and primary caregiver – because I know it has nothing to do with who gives birth to/biological parents – you have a different, maybe heightened relationship with the child. Perhaps this comes from the fact that you have to acknowledge that you are not always a wonderful parent when you are tired/stressed/irritated/annoyed and so when something goes wrong, there is some element of guilt attached. As a part time parent, I have the good fortune of mostly (not always) dealing with Reuben when he is in good spirits.

am able to give him what he needs in those moments, being more like him. Similarly, when I am distressed about something, I need the chance to talk it out, to verbalise and define what I am thinking and feeling, as does John. Jen and Simon crave quiet I think, and so Simon provides for Jen what she needs in the moment (I provide the assurance that John and Reuben's needs will be met, and that she will not undo the situation further with her reaction to it) and Simon provides the immediate relief. The encounter with the surgeon and his odd fascination with me could perhaps stem from his fantasizing about me in the role of mother, here clearly (in my reading of his reaction) is a woman who is made to be with/take care of children, and yet, now she has told me that she is *not* the mother of this child....perhaps she could be the mother of *mine*. Further, as a doctor who works presumably long and difficult hours (he said that he had lived in Auckland for some years and had never left the CBD) he was perhaps either reminded of the care his mother took of him, or was fantasizing again, of the care I could take of him.

When the doctors assumed, and were corrected, about me being Reuben's mother, I immediately became a more complex character in their minds. Who *is* this woman then, who *is* in the room with the father/husband and son/child, whilst the mother waits in the waiting room? What seems like a dysfunctional relation is not, but is only made so through our unconditional love as two couples in a relationship not just with their immediate other, but with the others immediate other. John's frustrated desire that Jen come in is warranted, but what would have made that situation dysfunctional is *not* that I was in the room instead, but that if he had forced the issue, and *made* her come in, that would have created a dysfunctional environment.

My earlier frustration with my own language barriers returns again, I need to find a way to begin to articulate in human language this divine relation between Reuben and I. How do I legitimize what I am to him, if I am only legitimized as his mother in the eyes' (words) of the other? Using the only tool I have to hand, I return to the structure of language. The word 'Mother' is a noun<sup>35</sup>. Nouns are split into Proper (Emily, London, Toyota) or Common (person, city, car). Mother fits both of those categories, it can be used to specifically identify a particular person, and it serves to categorize an entire group of people, so it is a Collective Noun. Nouns are then split into concrete and abstract. Abstract nouns refer to concepts, like hatred, or justice. If a concrete noun means to be able to observe a physical entity with the senses, then mother is concrete, yet it is also abstract in the sense that it refers to an idea ("Stop mothering me!"). I continue this process in order to find a way in which I can justify and explain my position to others. Perhaps what we need here is a suffix to mother, by adding -ness, -ity, -ion, can I use human language to open up this word Mother?

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35 From the Latin *nōmen*: name.

The fact we still call mothers ‘mother’ seems to be a hangover from a time when mother was a role played by many to one child. For example, what happens if you yell out “Mother?!” in a grocery store? Multiple women might turn towards the noise. If the role of the mother is only to be played between one specific woman as related to a specific child, then would it not make sense for the child to call the mother by its first name? Yet we do not do so<sup>36</sup>. The fact that we don’t indicates to me that there is a reason why mother is a universal term, applied to many women. That many women can mother a child. That a child can call on anyone to mother it at any given time, given need. It also suggests that a female identity can be fully cloaked by this name, whereby all women who are mothers are in some sense the same without difference.

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<sup>36</sup> Of course some people do, generally though, we hear children say Mum, Mummy, Ma, Mama, Mother etc.

Five minutes into the hour, Lewis, knowing that my mother and husband are in the room, bravely asks “So no one knows who that is?” John replies and says “His name is Reuben” to which someone responds “So, you know who he is?” and John responds “I know his name.”

Within minutes, this conversation has entered a territory of naming. That the name is the first thing through which we know someone is clear. “Is it Emily’s son?” Lewis asks. “I feel like I know she has a son.” he adds. Simon asks how many people in the room have been introduced to Reuben, about half say that they have. Mark then asks how many people in the room know the full context of Reuben’s parents. Now the question of ‘Who Is This?’ comes down to who his parents are. Mark then asks how many of those who know, are willing to disclose it. There is laughter, and then Simon says he will, but that he’d like to see where it goes first. Lily suggests that after the disclosure, this does not necessarily mean the question is answered. She says that she thinks the point is that one thing can mean, or be multiple things, and so once they reveal what he (Reuben) is to them, that they can then have a better understanding of what he (Reuben) is to other people. John, wanting to play, says

“You mean how Emily is his mother, but Kathy isn’t necessarily his grandmother?”

“Yes.” she says “On the non-disclosure side of the thing!” Laughter. Simon says it’s all about how you associate a word with something isn’t it? How you get meaning from it. (I want to say here, that I don’t really talk to Simon much about my research, I like my time at home to be time away from my research). Pritika relates her memory of meeting Reuben with me, thinking (and telling herself off for thinking it) that he didn’t belong to me. Mark asks then, if Reuben is my child, does that make Simon his father? Simon says no. Mark confirms;

“So you’re not Reuben’s father, and you’re (referring to Kathy) not Reuben’s grandmother?” Simon clarifies at this point that Kathy is his Mother-In-Law, not his mother, but then says

“But she is my mother.”

Mark says “Is Reuben Emily’s child?”

“Birth child.” someone else adds

“Child either way.” says Mark

“Yes.” someone says

“Or is Reuben borrowed?” asks Mark

John laughs and says “Well how long has she borrowed him for?!”

Mark asks how many times people have seen him in the building, and the conversation covers when and where people have seen him with me. This is evidence being presented. Once or twice people say.

“Is he a performance piece?” asks Amy

People laugh and Amy does not pursue the question.

Kathy asks Pritika why it was that she thought Reuben didn’t belong to me, was it that he didn’t look like me? Pritika says it was not necessarily that, that there was maybe something in the way I refereed to him that tipped her off, but that she didn’t think he looked like me. Kathy asks if it was the hair colour, and shares that I am naturally blonde. Someone else adds that Reuben and I have the same colour eyes. John says maybe he looks like the father. Lily asks if Pritika thinks that I led her to believe he was my son, or if she presumed he was. She says she believes I said he was my son (I remember this encounter, all I said was “This is Reuben.” It was during the Porte Cochere event), and then goes on to question her own recollection. Mark then says he wants my primary supervisor to share with the group the context of this performance within the structure of a Masters at AUT. Maria remains silent, at which point Albert (also teaching staff) says indicates that Maria shouldn’t necessarily know anything about my personal life, as it’s not a criteria for supervision.

Maria asks “What do you want me to reveal?”

Mark wants to know her understanding or position on this.

“My understanding and position on whether Reuben is Emily’s child?”

“Who is Reuben?” asks Mark

Maria says “That’s a photo of Reuben. That’s not Reuben. It’s a representation. It’s an image.”

She goes on to say that she cannot qualify if that is Reuben or not, because there is so much possibility for the doctoring of images today. Laughter. John says “She is good on Photoshop.”

“Yeah she is.” Maria says “She’s a good designer.” Maria refers here to the composite that I made of me and my grandmother which came to look like my mother.

Albert refers to Simon and says “So you’re supposed to be Reuben’s father?”

Simon says “No I’m not Reuben’s father.”

Lewis asks “Does Reuben live at your house?”

“Nope.” Simon responds

Melanie now asks “Does Reuben live at Emily’s house?”

Albert asks “Who’s Reuben’s father?”

John says “I don’t know that Emily knows who Reuben’s father is.”

Laughter. Jen gasps and then laughs (for after all, though meant to cast a funny aspersion on my truthfulness as a mother, it instead casts aspersion upon Jen).

John says to Simon “Well if its not you!”

Simon says “It could be you.”

John says “Could be me.” and then says “No, I’ve not been there with Emily.”

Laughter. Then Albert says “He’s got a mother.”

Melanie says “So the father’s not in this room?”

Mark asks “Who’s Reuben’s mother?”

Albert says “I assumed it’s Emily.”



“Could he be anything other than somebody’s son?” Pritika asks

“You’d hope so.” says Simon

“He could be a friends son.” Mark says

“I think it’s fair to say he is somebody’s son. Two peoples son.” Kathy says

“He could be old enough to have his own personality.” Pritika says

“It could be quite an old picture.” John says

“He has to have a biological father, a biological mother.” Albert states

“Is Reuben old enough to talk?” Lewis asks (perhaps they can get their evidence from him...)

They discuss how old Reuben is. Two comes the answer from Jen. Mark asks “Did you say he’s two? How do you know he’s two?”

Jen says because she went to his birthday party last weekend.

“You went to his birthday party last weekend? If you went to his birthday party were his parents there?”

“Yeah.” Jen says

“So who are his parents?” Mark asks

“Oh. Um.” Jen laughs “Simon and Emily?”

Laughter, some mumblings. Simon then says “I’m not his biological father, but I do look after him”

Lily asks “How important is it to know who someone’s parents are in order to know who they are?”

No one answers. Lily says it was not a rhetorical question. John responds that it’s only important for biology, for medical reasons, otherwise it’s not at all.

Melanie says to Jen “It’s interesting that you said you were there.” and then refers to Simon and says “But you deny being his father.”

Both Simon and Lily confirm again that Simon is not Reuben’s father. “But is biology the only meaning of father?” Melanie asks. John says he saw a picture on Facebook of Emily holding Reuben’s birthday cake, and Simon holding Reuben. Mark asks “What does that say?”

“Emily’s a really good baker, and Simon is...quite strong!” John responds

Laughter. Albert says “Now Reuben goes to a...Emily has to rush out of here at three o’clock, to pick him up, he goes to a day care, so which one?” Mark asks if that is what I say I am doing. He asks Albert if he has ever been to the day-care with me. “No.” he says. Mark intimates that I could be lying, Albert says he believes me though. He says he has no reason to doubt me. He says he is now confused. Jen asks how he would feel if he knew I was lying to him. He says it would be very interesting. A long silence with a few mumbles occurs. Lewis asks, “Does anyone know Reuben’s last name?” Mark says Simon should. Simon won’t answer. Jen says she does “Moffett.”

“Reuben Moffett.” Mark says “Would that be also the father and mothers name?”

“Ahhh, no.” Jen says

“Would it be the fathers name?”

“Yes.” she answers

“My name is John Moffett.” says John

Mark asks Simon “And what’s your name...Simon...?”

“O’Hara.” he answers

John says there are three Moffett’s in the phone book. Mark asks if one of the other Moffett’s is the father, or if he is.

“Are you a cousin of the father?” someone asks

“He could be the father.” Mark says

“John are you the father of Reuben?” Lily asks

“Reuben is my son.” he answers

“Reuben is your son?” Mark confirms, and then asks Jen “So are you Reuben’s mother?”

“Yes.” she answers

“We’re Reuben’s biological parents.” John says

“So if you’re Reuben’s biological parents, does Emily pick Reuben up from the day care?” Mark asks

“Yes.” they both say

“How often?”

“Quite often.” both of them say

“As often as he (Albert) would suggest?” asks Mark

“No.”

“In which case, what is Emily’s relationship to Reuben?” he asks “Or don’t you know?”

“It’s non defined.” says Jen, with John mumbling the same

“But you do know it?” asks Mark

“Well no, you can’t define it in a word.” John says

“No not in a word, but in a couple of sentences.” Mark says

Laughter. John then says “I would say, to an extent, that Emily has a right to call Reuben her child.”

“Was she the surrogate mother of Reuben?” Melanie asks

“No. Jen definitely had him.” he answers

Lewis asks John if Reuben calls he and Jen Mum and Dad, he answers that Reuben calls them both Mummy. Someone asks Simon what Reuben calls he and I. Simon says nothing, then adds that Reuben calls him the sign for ‘more’ which I taught him, and he uses most often with Simon who plays with Reuben in a manner which involves pillows, and throwing into the air which he loves, and always wants more of.

Mark asks John if we are good friends. John recounts the story of how we met, and how Simon and I invited him to our wedding. Mark asks at the end of this if that means we are good friends, and suggests that you wouldn’t necessarily be happy for anyone other than a close friend to have a long and close relationship with your child. John says that they would hand Reuben off to anyone. Laughter. “He’s two!” Laughter. “But we’re close with Emily. Very close.”

“If Emily has the right to call Reuben her child, is it because she did something to help him come into being?” Pritika asks “Did she deliver him or something?” John says no, nothing in terms of the birth or the pregnancy. Mark

says that it seems as though they are filling in small details about lives and people. He says in one respect they can all now categorically agree that Reuben is John and Jen's child. He asks if anyone wants to hold out on that. Simon raises his hand at the same time John laughingly says "We could be lying."

Simon says he agrees that John and Jen made Reuben, but he doesn't necessarily think that means he's their child anymore. Albert asks if Simon and John are brothers. Simon says they are not.

Lewis asks John if he and Jen are married.

"Yes."

"Longer than two years and nine months?" Lewis asks

"No. We were married this May." John says. People want to know where they were married. Monte Christo Room.

"So who is he...he's John and Jen's son." Lily says

"Reuben Moffett" Lewis says "Is that his full name? Is that what's on his birth certificate?"

"Sinclair. Reuben Sinclair Moffett" Lily says

"And he lives with you guys?" asks Melanie. John accedes "Mm hmmm."

"Permanent residence?" Melanie asks

Lewis, confusing Simon's comment for John, says "But you wouldn't necessarily call him your child anymore?"

John says "No, he is most definitely our child."

Zammia asks if Simon and I live with John and Jen. Simon says that we don't. Albert asks Simon if we (Simon and Emily) have a child. Simon says no. Zammia then goes to ask again, if Reuben lives with Simon and I, and then remembers this question has already been answered. She asks if Reuben lives with Emily. Simon answers no. Pritika asks Simon if he lives with Emily, to which Simon answers that he does. Melanie states that Simon has said 'we' don't have a child, but asks if Emily has a child that is not Reuben. Someone mutters in the background about there being so many confusing relationships. Someone asks a question which cannot be heard, and then Maria loudly asks "So did she say her child was Reuben...to you?"

"I wasn't told a name." Zammia answers

"You weren't told a name." Maria replies

"So what gives Emily the right to call Reuben her child?" Zammia asks

John clarifies "No, I said I wouldn't be opposed to Emily calling Reuben her child."

"Oh, ok." says Zammia "Because?"

"What about me?" Simon asks

"Sorry?" John says

"What about me?" Simon repeats

"If you called Reuben your child?" John says "No I wouldn't be opposed to that either."

"Would it make a difference if it wasn't in an academic setting?" Lily asks

"If it was a biology class then yes, maybe!" John answers

"What if Mark called Reuben his child?" Simon asks

John says he would find that strange. Mark says that's fine. Laughter.

“So he’s a child that has multiple parents?” Lily asks “In a way...?”

No answer given. “So is he, lucky?” Lily says.

Laughter.

“I think that Reuben is a really gregarious little boy, who’s really inquisitive, he’s a genuine two year old, he’s loving and affectionate, he’s comfortable in most situations, but not in all situations, but he is most definitely a gorgeous wee two year old. He’s just delightful. <something inaudible> He’s got wonderful parents, and he’s got wonderful people in his life. He’s a lovely wee boy.”

“Is Reuben 100% healthy? Is he 100% normal child? He doesn’t have a disability or any of that sort of thing?” Lewis asks

“No.” John answers

“No, definitely normal!” Kathy says

“Just below that on the picture there its all....robot!” John says. Laughter. “Cyborg.”

“Ahhhh, so Emily engineered him...” Pritika says

Laughter. “The only thing she hasn’t figured out is how to take out the batteries.” Kathy says “But she’s working on it.”

“I always said, ummm, with my group of friends, we have a very close knit group of about...12 to 14 of us, that any child born into a family, or a couple within our group of friends was being born into a village, because of the nature of our friendships. So, in a sense, anyone within that group has a role to play in his life, and has, I guess, you know...I wouldn’t be opposed to any of those people saying that Reuben was their child, because they all help to raise him, and bring him up and are a big part of his life.” John says

“So in regards to talk of this...village...” Lewis begins

“We don’t live in a commune!” John jokes. Laughter.

“No, but is Reuben the only child?” Lewis asks “From the other 14 people, have there been other children?”

“There is one other, and there’s another on the way.” John answers

“So would you feel comfortable referring to him having siblings in the village?” Lewis asks

“Yeah, I think when he and the other child are together they play like, you know, brothers” John says “They play like any children, they fight, they push each other out of rooms.”

“That’s not an unusual situation, certainly when I was your age, um, with my group of friends and our children, would have been exactly the same. We would have collectively felt that the children were our children.” Mark says “I think it’s a fairly common kind of situation.”

“Did you take photos of the other children to your classes and talk about them?” Pritika asks

Laughter.

“Um. Um. I have. Yup.” Mark answers

“With his big photo though, all I keep thinking is, who is he, he’s a baby, he’s the subject of 15 or 16 people, adults, sitting around like seriously discussing him, which is a pretty privileged position, or strange or something.” Lily says

“I guess, like, we’ve established his name, and who his parents are, like what is the answer that we’re actually like, looking for?” Lewis asks “We have like a description of him and his characteristics, but without being...you know? It’s like if someone said, Who’s Mark Jackson? I wouldn’t be like, oh, well sorry I don’t know your parents names” he says to Mark “But I wouldn’t refer to you as that. And so, it’s not like we’ve answered the question...he’s ah,



Reuben Moffett...ah I don't know man." Laughs.

"Is the subject of the question about identity?" someone asks

"And there are various ways to approach that." Mark says "But I think there are certain um, frameworks for approaching that identity that we can all agree on. Some of us might say he's actually <inaudible> some might say he's the sweetest kid I've ever met, and so we might have differences like that, but there are certain fundamental issues around identity that we could all agree on."

"Such as?" Maria asks

"Unless they're lying..." John <in background>

"Such as, he just turned two, um, he's their (John and Jen's) biological child, um he has a nice kind of village people relationship..." Mark says. Laughter.

"Are you part of a cult?" Albert asks. Laughter. "Do you all go to the same church or...?"

"So I guess what you're suggesting though...Mark?" Maria says "I guess what you're suggesting is that the identity comes from the place of the other? That it's those who name..."

"No" Mark interrupts "All I'm saying is..."

"Because would Reuben enunciate it like that? Would he say..." Maria says

"No the question is Who Is? Who is, is a very open...question." Mark interrupts again

"But certain things are agreed upon." Maria says

"But we've already ascertained certain ways of approaching...that." Mark says

"But doesn't it seem a bit small? I feel like to me, it's a small answer and that she's wanting something bigger and the answers got to be within the context of her work....or you know I feel like its small to say that that's it. Do you know what I mean? It's strange to me." Lily says

"Well, it might be in fact he has been the, um, the <inaudible> ruse throughout the year, a performative ruse, the performance of a ruse, in the context of the performance work we're all engaged in at the moment, he continues to be the subject of a ruse." Mark says

"So what has he done?" Lily asks "Because I've not been duped. I knew who he was. So people who've been involved in it, who've realised now that he is something other than what they were led to believe he was..."

"Or led themselves to believe he was." Simon says

"Yeah, what, how then do you feel, what, who is he to you then? Or like, what is the..." says Lily

"Mm. Now that he's no longer Emily's son, who is he?" John says

"And why do we define it like that? Do we need to look at the question? Because it's who is he...in a way that we can't explain, we've got these automatic responses like...'someone's son', like what you were saying before (referring to Lily) but just taking it a bit..." Nicola says

"Well I haven't spent that much time with him...to be able to answer that question." Amy says

"And we'd all still have different opinions anyway." Nicola says

"Like I've met him...no time, so. But you said quite a bit about his character." Amy says to Kathy

"I'm not really interested in his character..." Albert says in the background "More the idea that Emily told stories. What fascinates me is, there's a group of people that form a collaborative naming relationship with kids. I think it's really interesting." Albert says

Something inaudible from Amy, then laughter. They are saying it's still in the room, and easier to hear, now that the air conditioning has turned off.

"So would that be enough to tell Emily? Or do we need something bigger?" Albert asks

"I wanna go bigger guys!" Lily says. Laughter and agreements.

"I think hearing from those who have been duped is interesting, because obviously you came into this room with an assumption that that <sic> was Emily's son whether biological or not. Now you're sitting here, and you're sitting here with parents...so who is he, is he our parents? I mean, is he our son, are we his parents, yes, but who is he in terms of Emily? And in terms of what she's doing?" John asks

"So the concept of labelling?" Lily asks

"Yeah." John says

"So it's not who is he..." Mark begins

"Is he nothing to her other a friends son?" John asks

"...it's who is she? Isn't it? It's who is she." Mark continues

"Mmm." from Lily

"We've turned the whole thing around, it's now in the place of the other, who is she." Mark says

"I think Albert touched on it." Maria says "In part, that this, who is this is a signifier of something..."

"Something bigger." Mark interrupts

"...yes, something bigger, related to the ruse, which is performance, um, around Emily." Maria finishes

"Well Emily likes to lead people to believe a lot of things." Zammia says

"Ooooh." from Maria, and then laughter in the room.

"That's something about her though, she likes you to think something but she's really doing something else...she does that a lot." Zammia says

"Is that what Simon thinks?" Mark asks

"In relation to this year?" Simon says.

"Like, give an example. I'm quite interested." Jen asks

"Is Emily just telling massive lies all over the place?" John jokes

"Yeah, lets talk about Emily!" Albert says

"She, she, well, she likes to push the boundaries, and she likes to do things that you wouldn't really expect, like with my own assignments and stuff, when I've talked to her, she's always been like, 'why can't you do that?'" Zammia says

"Mmm." from both John and Jen

"...when I've thought like, that's really inappropriate." Zammia continues "But I don't know, like if she's not really going to pick him up at three o'clock, what's she doing?"

"But sometimes she does pick him up." John says

"Well you're taking that on what Albert has said, in regards to how often she's gone to do it, she has gone and done it..." Simon says to Zammia

“Yeah yeah, that’s what I mean...I don’t know whether it goes in the same kind of...thingy...or not, but she kind of likes to brain tease a bit.” Zammia says

“But do you think that would be more related to what she’s done here, in bringing all these people together? Rather than who she is?” Simon asks

Silence.

“Does your wife play mind games with you Simon?” John asks jokingly

Laughter. Simon actions a back hand slap.<sup>1</sup>

Albert asks Simon “If your name is O’Hara...Emily had a different name before.”

“Correct.” Simon says

“Why’d she change her last name?” Albert asks

“She didn’t like her other last name.”<sup>2</sup>

“Is that true?” Albert asks Kathy

“The name she was born with? Yeah.” she answers

“She had an opportunity through marrying Simon though.” Maria says

“She upgraded!” Simon says

“She married Simon, so she changed her name when she got married.” Kathy says

“When she started (uni) she had a different name though...” Albert says

“She just wanted my last name!” Simon jokes

To Albert, Kathy says “Emily has always been married since she’s been at uni.”

“Ahhh, ok.” Albert says

“She’s always been an O’Hara since she started.” Kathy says

“Oh so that was another student.” Albert says “Jessica Mentis<sup>3</sup>, she changed her name half way through the program. So I got confused...”

“Mm, yeah she did.” Maria says

“But going back to what you were saying about her playing mind games, isn’t it less her doing things to us, because it’s not like she can control us, it’s her giving us opportunities for our minds to wander in a way that they will and then kinda showing us what they’re doing. So by having the ruse of Reuben and then revealing it at some point you get to understand that you thought one thing which is entirely untrue but has elements of truth...” Lily says

“Do you feel angry that you’ve been lied to?” Jen asks

“No. I find it really interesting.” Zammia answers

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1 Please note, Simon was joking, even though he knows that domestic violence is not a joke.

2 It is not that I didn’t like my maiden name, it’s a lot harder to spell than my married name, and I was very certain that I wanted to take my husbands name when I married, regardless of what it was, or what my maiden name had been.

3 Who was the 16<sup>th</sup> person invited, and unable to attend. We formed a very close friendship early on in our time at Uni, so I’m not surprised Albert confused us for each other.

“The comment you were saying, with the mind games, and what Emily’s been doing with you in your assignments and going ‘Why cant you...’ do you feel that’s a good area for her to come from?” Kathy asks Zammia

“Like, do I...what do you mean?” Zammia says

“When she says to you ‘Why cant you’...”

“I think its good.”

“You think its good?”

“I like it.” Zammia says

“So its opening up opportunities for you to maybe look at, and part of what’s here is conditioning. Are we all conditioned in some way shape or form in parts of our thinking or beliefs and so on...so does it help to open up the opportunity to look at that.” Kathy says

“So what does that show us about Reuben? We limit ourselves to thinking that a child can only have two parents? Or that you only have a meaningful relationship with a child if you’re a biological parent?” Lily says

“It could be any or all of those Lily.” Kathy says “I don’t think it’s just related to Reuben, the ruse that Emily’s been doing with Reuben.”

“Has she set us up the whole year? ‘Cause I remember at the beginning of the year, like I was talking to her just casually about her life, and she was like, yeah I’m married and I’ve got a kid, so has she been like setting this up all year and that’s why we’re these 16 selected people, because she’s been playing mind games with us the whole year?” Melanie says

“Was that before or after Minxy<sup>4</sup> came along?” John asks

“No that was the end of last year.” Simon says

“Didn’t someone assume that Reuben was her child?” Lily asks

“Yup.” Simon says

“And at that point she realised the possibility of plagiarising that and running with it?”

“Oh she’s into plagiarising...” Zammia said. Laughter. “She told me!”

“But was that true...” Pritika says

Laughter. “She likes stealing peoples work, that’s what she said.”<sup>5</sup>

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4 A beautiful little kitten that we saved after her mother had her litter under a pile of wood in our garden. The mother rehomed the other kittens one by one to her house across the road (we think she had the kittens somewhere safe, away from the large Doberman also living at her house) she had one kitten left to transfer when the owners found the mother and kittens and removed them to another house (that they actually live in). We hesitated to tell them about the last kitten as we have several times called animal protection services about the neglect of their dog, who has now been removed from them, hopefully along with the cat and kittens too.

5 In light of this being an academic document I’d like to clarify that I don’t like plagiarism, and nor do I plagiarise. I also don’t like to steal other people’s ideas...what I believe Zammia was referring to is conversations that we had during teaching in studio and theory. The first was when we were looking at design blogs and talking about cool things she had seen online while researching for her studio project, the conversation drifted into a territory of where ideas come from, and I said something along the lines of different people from vastly different times/places/spaces coming up with identical, or very similar ideas. I had an experience of this when I designed a furniture object in my first year of undergrad. I later saw a very similar piece of furniture designed by a major manufacturer in Sweden (I had not previously seen their design). The other conversation had to do with original thought, in relation to lecture material, or conversations with tutors. I was musing on the fact that as our teachers and tutors share with us their information and knowledge, we absorb it, interrogate it, regurgitate it and think it is ‘ours’, which of course



"I noticed at the beginning of the year, I just met her at the beginning of the year, and I just noticed from the way she would set up her desk that she would create a performance for us, and we could choose to interact with it or not." Pritika says

"Like leaving rotting fruit on her desk for weeks to see if we would sort of clear it away or not?" Amy says

Laughter. "But the fruit became beautiful and then disgusting, and beautiful and disgusting...she would leave different books about live performances and people who's lives are their performance and slowly without having ever really talked to Emily for like, months, I kind of knew a lot, but nothing about her from the performances that she made for us...or I assumed that's what they were." Pritika says<sup>6</sup>

"I just thought she was messy, but Pritika thought she was performing," from Amy

"So you felt comfortable to look through..." Maria

"Rummage around her desk? Totally." Pritika says "Because the books were like facing out towards us and she had told me at the beginning of the year that she wanted her desk to face the whole room"

"But are they facing out towards you or are they just facing that way?" Maria asks

"Well they were facing towards Amy but I just invited myself into it, but I thought that at the beginning of the year that she set up performances on her desk...that's how I read it anyway. I thought it was interesting. I almost added a piece of cheese to the rotting fruit...so this seems like a really, like an extension of what I've seen her doing in other smaller ways, more players, with a more specific game, really specific set...it's quite nice to be part of it as a kind of stalker-y person ." Pritika says

"Can you intuit what her...maybe its too limiting that she might have a goal but like..." Lily asks

"Um it seemed like her, and I have heard a little bit about her practice but not a lot actually um, that her life's work is her study, so the plays that she creates the set for, and her family life and her child and everything are part of her own study...that's how I kind of read the desk situation." Pritika says

"And this?" Lily asks

"This is definitely kind of like the 'Masters show'..." Pritika says

"She's never really directed you to read it like that." Maria says "You've read signs and clues."

"Yeah I picked up..."

"It's kind of encrypted..." Maria says

"But it was different than say being in the studio with other people...that I didn't pick up those same things from them, but I picked them up from Emily" Pritika says "I definitely made lots of assumptions...but I think that's ok."

"If it was her aim then she's a very clever lady." John says

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it is. I was suggesting that when we look at the work of other people, the parts of it that pique our interest inevitably become folded into our own practices as designers and thinkers.

6 I did indeed place photographs, books and other objects in plain sight for anyone in the postgraduate studio to view. The incident with the fruit was also a small part of this. There is always someone who cleans. In the home, in the office, in the studio...there is always, or often I find, one person who collects all the dirty dishes, washes them, dries them, puts them away, who does the rubbish, clears out the fridge of leftovers and rotting food, and keeps the domestic side of our professional lives in order. I am normally that person. It pains me to be so. In this case, I simply stopped doing it out of a desire to see what would happen. Would someone else take on that role? They did not. The domestic side of our professional/learning environment became disgusting. It did not resolve itself until I once again began doing those tasks later in the year. In the meantime I believe the fridge, and dishes etc still got used, but those using them would only wash what they used, leaving the mass of filth for someone else to eventually deal with.



Fig. 55. Emily O'Hara, Film Stills, *The Bunker* #1: First guest arrives.

Fig. 56. Emily O'Hara, Film Stills, *The Bunker* #2: People settle.

Fig. 57. Emily O'Hara, Film Stills, *The Bunker* #3: Giving the instructions.

Fig. 58. Emily O'Hara, Film Stills, *The Bunker* #4: Handing out the envelopes.

Fig. 59. Emily O'Hara, Film Stills, *The Bunker* #5: Discussion begins.

Fig. 60. Emily O'Hara, Film Stills, *The Bunker* #6: Discussing the performance with Kathy and Simon after it ends.

“Yeah.” Pritika says

“And if it wasn’t...you’re quite nosy.” John jokes. Laughter.

“I don’t know all your names.” Albert says “My name is Albert”

“I’m Kathy.”

“I’m Lily.”

“I’m Pritika.”

“Nicola.”

“Jay.”

“Amy.”

“Jen.”

“John.”

“Mark.”

“Lewis.”

“Zammia.”

“Um, who is this. Maria.”

Laughter.

“Simon.”

“Who are you really?” Mark says

“Do you know us better?” Maria asks

“Who are we all in relation to Emily?” Zammia asks

“Yeah that’s a good one.” Albert says

“Mmm, interesting.” Maria says

“Grandfather.” Mark says. Laughter.

“Really?!”

“No.”

“You’re waaaay too young for that role” Kathy says

Albert now says “Mum.” indicating Kathy.

Lily says “I’m in the village, and her brothers partner.”

Pritika says “Um I’m her classmate.”

Nicola says “She’s a tutor, officially...and a friend.”

Jay says “Same, she’s a tutor of mine.”

Amy says "Classmate."

Jen says "Friend."

John says "Friend."

Mark says "Friend."

Lewis says "Tutor of mine."

Zammia says "Yeah she's a tutor of mine."

Maria says "Friend."

Simon says "Wife."

"I just have one question, as for Jay, cause you haven't really said anything, but did you know, did you know that, cause I've picked up from everyone else that they knew Reuben existed before tonight." Lewis says

"I, I've never seen Reuben before." Jay says

"But did you know that there was a Reuben?" Lewis says

"No."

"No?"

"I'm surprised because I'm the only one who's been in class with her for like, me and Albert were probably the ones who..." Jay says

I interrupt at this point, to give them a fifteen minute warning call.

"But you never knew there was a Reuben?" Lewis continues

"No." Jay says

"So what was your first thought when...who did you think that was (referring to the photograph)? Obviously you thought it was a baby and then it said 'Who Is This', a baby? Automatically what did you think?" John asks Jay

"Ah, not a child of Emily's." Jay answers

"Right." John says "And someone thought it was a girl?"

No answer.

"Don't worry, they think that all the time."

Laughter.

"Could be, but I knew it was Reuben." Mark says

"The first assumption about him is that he's a girl." John says

"You should see John when he's got long hair..." Simon jokes

"One ugly girl." John jokes back

"Is his dummy one of those, like a gummy bear lolly?" Melanie asks

"It's latex." John answers

"Oh."



“Yeah but the assumption generally is that ‘she’s very pretty’.” John says

“I think I might have thought feminine thoughts when I first met him.” Nicola says

“Mm.” from both John and Jen

“That’s the only thing she didn’t leave open...who is he...not what is this...” Lily says

“It is “Who Is This”...” someone says

“Oh is it?” Lily says

Laughter.

“What is this...” John says, laughing.

“It’s a photograph!” Simon says

“So...” Lily says

“But she didn’t leave it as an assumption, she named him.” Kathy says

“So what’s our answer?” Lily asks

Silence. Then Lewis says “Well I guess in some sense he’s Emily’s years work, or I don’t know, how long has this been going on for? Like, a year?”

“That’s a good point.” Lily says

“He’s her work, you know?” Lewis says

“Yeah.” say Lily and John

“So what’s the performance work Maria?” Albert asks

“This the performance work? I think, around naming, is discussed, and conventions, and assumptions, and questions of identity, um...trust. Wrap that into a nice little bow and you might have something about Emily’s project.” answers Maria

“It’s really familiar too, the setting is really nice.” Albert says

“Yeah, the domestic, yeah we haven’t commented on the environment.” Maria says

“It’s really Emily.” Pritika says

“Do you guys really listen to this music at home?” Albert asks Simon

“Oh yeah...!” Kathy says

“Emily does.” says Simon

“Mm.” Albert reponds. Laughter.

“We do.” Kathy says

“This feels very comfortably Emily.” John says “I think if we had of come in and there was a trestle table with wine glasses and office chairs I would have not felt like Emily had put it together, I would have felt like someone had done it on her behalf. This feels like Emily has bought us together in this space.”

“It reminds me of a scene at the end of Poirot where <inaudible> and then he tells you who murders him.” Lily says

“Yeah.” Maria says

Laughter.

“Is Reuben alive?” John says

Laughter.

“Well I can agree to the answer of that question that this is her years work. It’s suitably on point.” Lily says

“I think, just going on what Emily has spoken to us about over the year in her work, sorry while I have cookie in my mouth, um, one of the things you said Maria we have picked up and spoken about a lot of the things that she has touched on, sort of aims or goals, milestones for her, for her through the year talking about naming, you know what is a name, what is a title, um, and assumptions, you know. The assumption that some people thought it was a girl, some people thought it was automatically Emily’s child, some people might have thought it was Emily’s child, but that it didn’t look like Emily...” John says

“It is a woman, so the assumption is that because she’s a woman and holding a baby, that of course it’s her baby.” Jen says

“I think I thought it was really interesting, sorry to butt in, but I did think it was really interesting, when I said ‘Does this little one belong to you?’ and she said something like ‘This is my wee man’” Nicola says

“Mmm, mm, yeah.” John says

“So yeah.” Nicola says

“It would have been interesting if Simon was holding Reuben whether everyone would have assumed oh, is this yours, or where’s his mum? Because I know as a father, than I often get questioned about his mother before I get questioned about me in relation to him. Even though for the majority of his life I’ve been a stay at home dad for most of the time. So my time has been predominantly with him. Hence why he calls both of us Mummy.” John says

Laughter.

“But that was a natural occurrence. Like we always refer to John as ‘Dad’, but he just still says Mum. Mummumumumum.” Jen says

“But also you know the fact that people who have been around her in the academic setting for years, didn’t think maybe ‘She was pregnant?’” Jen says

“I did, I actually thought...I actually had a conversation with her ‘I didn’t realise you were pregnant’, she had me on...” Albert says

Laughter.

“Yeah.” Jen says

“I’m a typical bloke. Things go around you.” Albert says. Laughter.

“So if we call it her years work, yet Reuben is actually two and a half years old, is it really only a years work or is it two and a half?” Melanie says

“Well he’s two. He’s just turned two.” Jen says

“Sorry. So is he only a years work or is he...two years?” Melanie says

“I think academically he’s been a years work, but in terms of the broader picture, just over two.” John says

A phone rings.

“Does anyone disagree with that?” Lewis asks

“With what?” someone asks

“With that as a statement.” Lewis says “She’s gonna come in and I think you’re the one who has to...”

“Did you say one year or two years, do you all agree...” Pritika says

“Well its been a one year project hasn’t it?” Mark says

A lot of confused talking for a few seconds.

“So she decided this time last year that this was going to be her project?” Albert asks

“It just naturally occurred didn’t it?” Jen says

Another few moments of confused mumbling. I can hear people trying to identify when the performance began/ was conceived/initiated.

“But do we have to put a time frame on it though?” Melanie says

“It could be the result of...cause, it accumulated over a year, its not like a year ago she was like, ok, I’m going to meet these people and I’m going to in a way suggest that this is my son, because she wouldn’t have known this time last year that she was going to meet us.” Zammia says

“Not to mention that she would have to do it with a child that could come to an exhibition with her an be comfortable and behave, I think he sat on your knee (to Mark)...so you know I think that probably plays into is as well. She couldn’t have just picked any child to do it with.” John says “There had to be more to it than that.”

“Yeah.” Jen says

“There had to be like a familial basis there in the first place.”

“And he couldn’t be able to talk...” Lily says

“Or he’d give it away!” John says

Laughter.

“And she had to have ongoing access.”

“So the question is “Who Is This”, and this is the subject of her work, or?” Zammia says

“The thing is, who’s receiving this answer?” Nicola says

“This is her works subject then.” Zammia says

“She does refer to the photograph as...it says ‘the question relates to the subject in the photograph.’” Pritika says

“So the focus was the subject at the time?” Nicola says

Confused mumbling and multiple conversations happen. A hint of someone saying they are going over the whole background again. Laughter.

“But saying that it’s a one year project, is that how we’re describing it to her? Or is the decision as like universally...” Nicola says

“We’re all going to totally and absolutely lie and say we’ve all agreed, that Reuben is your child.” Mark says. Laughter. “And that it’s not Simon’s, and we’re not sure if you had it, but it’s definitely your child.”

Laughter. “But then is that like, the ‘Who Is This’...” Nicola says

“It’s ‘definitely your daughter’.” says John

“But are we defining it by that relationship?” Nicola continues “We’ve got to really think about that question, like ‘Who Is This’ and how automatically our answers were like, when we’re trying to describe who someone is we’re describing who their parent is, or what their relationship is to the person that gave us this project. And by even saying that its her one year project, again, is that not just saying...who would you tell that to? Would this just be an answer for Emily? To say ‘this is my one year project’? Or if someone else walked into the room and we were like ‘It’s your one year project’ they’d be like...?”

John mumbles agreement.

“It’s not telling you “Who Is This”” Nicola says

“I think if we said to Emily that this was her one year project I think she’d be offended. Based on the fact that her relationship with the person in that picture goes way beyond...” John says

“Well if you drop the one year time frame” Simon says “And just said ‘this is your work’?”

“Yes, but...” Mark says “Let’s try her out on that for the instrumentalism which she used Reuben for. Let’s call her bluff on that one.”

“I don’t think it was predetermined.” Maria says “I don’t think it was instrumental.

Someone says they think it was, someone else disagrees. Melanie laughingly says “I think she’s been conning me the whole year!”

“She did maintain it with ferocity once she’d begin right?” Lily says “Don’t you think?”

“She just used that kid.” Mark says

Laughter.

“Mark. If you were an examiner to this work for spatial design, how would you see it as spatial design?” Albert asks

“Now we’re asking what is spatial design.” Maria says

Laughter.

“I think a whole range of ways. This is the space where she had studio, this is the space where we had theory, this is the space that she occupied mostly in the institution. She’s turned it into little bits of her house. Her domesticity, so she’s played precisely with the folding and exteriority of it. And the group of people, gosh you couldn’t have picked a better group of people to criss-cross her existence. And here we’re all sitting rubbing shoulders like we’ve known each other forever, and in fact, you’re my student, you’re almost a stranger...” Mark says

Laughter. “Yeah you know our son better...!” Jen says

“And um, we go way back (to Albert), and I’ve met you all the time in the context of being Emily’s mum.” Mark says

“Which is true by the way.” Kathy says

Laughter.

“Ah so again, in terms of a kind of spatiality and a folding of various locales, into this domesticity that is at the same time to scene of her teaching, its really interesting. And Reuben’s at the centre, though he’s on the margin (referring to the position of the photograph in relation to the group)” Mark says. Two people say they cannot see him as the picture is places behind them.

“So...what are we saying then?” Jen says, laughing.

“So are we still saying that Reuben is Emily’s project?” Pritika says

“I think he’s been an integral part.” Kathy says



“We should just get Mark to do his schpeal.” Albert says

Laughter.

“I think he’s been an integral part of the whole process, of...” Kathy says

“Mm.” John agrees

“Because there is a lot of other parts.” Jen says

“And I don’t think, well it wasn’t a premeditated decision like ‘I’m going to do this and see what happens’ it has unfolded and as a result of that its like, well, what happens when this happens? How do people perform? Emily’s work has been a lot about discovering for herself about how she performs and recognizing that everyday we’re all performing in some way shape or form. And we’re all assuming so many things within those performances that we’re involved on, and those that we’re on the periphery of, but there’s a huge amount of assumptions that go with it. And I think that’s how this came into being with Reuben is that there were assumptions that were made because Reuben was in the same time/space where people were in a position to make some assumptions, and I think that’s been huge to I’m assuming, and this is an assumption, that Emily’s the only one that’s been in the centre to see how its been affecting or the assumptions that have gone on around her, because we’ve only been able to see it from our perspective but she knows what’s been going on, and she’s been able to see and calibrate what’s going on from everybody. So I see that Reuben is an integral part, of this by chance, not by force.” Kathy says

“But its fair to say that he’s the perfect object of the subject; of assumption, being able to explore assumption and naming” Lily says

“Yeah I think it came about, I can’t remember how it came about, can you remember?” John says to Simon “Someone assumed...?”

“I think she was looking after Reuben” Simon says “I’m sure she’d bought him here for some reason, cause she was looking after him for you guys, and someone came up to her and said...something along the lines of ‘is this your son’ and she just said ‘this is Reuben’ and they said ‘He’s got your eyes.’”

“That’s right.” Jen says

“Dead give away.” Mark says

“And also people who you would think would know the biological impossibility of her being the mother assumed that too, and that was really...” Maria says

“Who was that?” Albert asks

“Fleur.” Maria answers

I enter the room and inform them their hour is up.

“Sweet!” someone says

“Do you have an answer?” I ask

“No.” Simon says

“Have we got an answer for you!” Mark says

“We’ve got many.” Lily says

“We’re pretty close.” Maria says

“Do you need more time?” I ask

“No we’re done.” Mark says

“So you have an answer?” I say

“No.”

“So you need more time?” I say again

“If you gave us five minutes we could clarify.” John says

“Five minutes?” I confirm

“Do you want a sentence?” someone asks

“You can give me a word or a sentence or a paragraph, as long as it’s unanimous.” I say

They reduce their need to three minutes. I leave the room

“What’s come up a lot is that Reuben is her ongoing years work project. Is there anything else that we want to add to that?” Pritika says “Can we unanimously decide that that is part of our final answer?”

“After going around this and sitting her and going through this, my interpretation is that Reuben has become a learning and understanding experience for every one involved.” Simon says

“Because it’s Who is He...now.” Nicola says

“It is how everybody interacted and what they got out of it, it’s them.” Simon says

People voice their agreement to this statement.

“Has it impacted on you?” Mark asks

“In...what do you mean by that?” Simon asks

“Like have they done anything out of the normal...?” John asks

“...out of the normal? No.” Simon says

“I mean because there may have been inferences that you were Reuben’s ‘father’.” Mark says

“No, no one ever came out and asked that.” Simon responds

“That was never an issue? For anybody?” says Mark

“No. Well no one ever asked me.” Simon says

“Go figure.” Mark says

“Whether or not...I was never introduced as being Reuben’s father no one ever asked the question, no one ever asked me the question...” Simon says

“They never do.” John says

“I also have a quick confession” Nicola says “I think it was me that said ‘looks like, that your eyes are the same’...”

Laughter.

“And he was blonde as well, and I didn’t really see that, because the dark and the blonde contrast. But I’m pretty sure it was me that was like ‘You’ve got the same eyes’” she continues, “because she’s got blue eyes...and I thought, because they were both quite striking. Just as a side...”

“In terms of the piece though, Emily and Simon have done nothing outside of what would be expected...of what our friends do for each other. We would be quite happy for Emily to bring him here to an exhibition whether he was going to be part of it or not, because to be honest the first time, she was just bringing him here, she wasn’t bring-

ing him as part of anything, it was just ‘I’m going to an exhibition, want me to take Reuben’ why not?’ John says

“So what was it you said that people felt comfortable with, agreed with?” Lily asks Simon

“Um that he’d become a learning and understanding experience for each person involved in the story or the lie, or ruse, whatever you want to call it.” he answers

“Because that’s the most we know about him, people who don’t even know about his existence, the most we know about him has happened in...” Nicola says

“And everybody has got something different out of it.” Simon says

“And is that the maximum that we know? That’s all we’ve heard in this conversation?” Nicola says

Everyone voices their agreement to Simon’s suggestion. Someone asks if anyone disagrees, there is no one.

Pritika confirms that they all agree on Simon’s suggestion.

“Do we only have to have one answer?” Albert asks

Noise erupts.

“What does unanimous mean?” Albert asks

More noise erupts as everyone answers at the same time.

I enter the room. Pritika says Simon is going to give a really succinct answer. As I settle myself within the group we chatter about silly things, the warmth of the room, the air conditioning.

“So what’s the answer?” I ask

“Simon?” Lily says

“Um we came to the unanimous decision that Reuben, oh, “Who Is This” is Reuben, and Reuben has become a learning and understanding experience for each individual person involved.” Simon says

“Involved in what?” I ask

“In this.” John says

“Involved in this, who’s been involved with meeting Reuben, been in this discussion...not just in the discussion but...” Simon says

“I think anyone who’s met Reuben or interacted with you over the time of your academic year.” John says

“But he’s not your child” Albert says

“He’s not my child?” I say

“The important thing is that we’re unanimous.” Mark states

“Well he is y our child, but not your biological child.” Albert says

“He’s not my biological child.” I repeat. Laughter. “Now we’re back to where we started...!” Melanie says. Laughter.

The conversation continues for a few more minutes, with them asking questions for clarification, which I would not really answer, asking if I had recorded the conversation, they said I should have, I lied and said I hadn’t, hoping they would test me. Mark remarked that if John, Jen, Simon and I were all there “Where is Reuben?” I knew where Reuben was. John says he knows. Kathy says she knows. Jen says that I knew before she did. “Reuben’s everywhere!” John says. Laughter. Then I divulge where Reuben is and tell them that the performance is over, and after some chatter everyone leaves. I remain for awhile discussing the performance with my mother and husband, then pack up and leave.





Fig 61. Emily O'Hara, *Photograph, The Bunker #7*: The location where I watched the performance unfold via a live feed.



I have previously said that it occurred to me half way through this year long performance that it would never be possible to ‘finish’ it. There is no tidy end to this, where I can reveal the performance to all who encountered it. I had thought through several different performances or events throughout the year, in which I had planned to tell ‘everyone’ about the year long performance. I realised that this was impossible, yet I still wanted some kind of conclusion for myself. I required I think, a line in the sand, past which I would no longer ‘lie’, a line that would mark an end to the active perpetuation of the performance.

The 16 people I chose for the performance were those with whom I had specifically engaged in one way or another, with the year long performance (with one exception). They were friends, family, colleagues and students. I had come to believe that because it was initially (and continually) the people around me who created and perpetuated the performance, that I would ask one seemingly simple question of them, and let them undo the performance for themselves. I didn’t want to get in the way, I didn’t want to be there to answer questions, to close possibilities, I didn’t want to be there because I did not want to name in so few words, the adventure that had taken place. I felt that if I named the performance so abruptly, the possibility for other adventures to stem from this one would dissipate.

Eight of those who were present were outside of the performance, in that they knew the ‘true’ context of my relationship with Reuben. The remaining seven were outside of the truth, as such they were *inside* the performance. However, this dialectic of inside and outside is more complicated than that. One could say that those who knew the context of the relationship were outside of the performance, however they showed themselves to be inside of it in the sense that they perpetuated the myth of the performance for as long as they could. Those who were unaware of the true context of my relationship with Reuben were also both inside and outside, they were inside the performance in the way that they perceived there to be only one truth, that I was his mother. They were outside the performance in that they were unaware of the performance itself, until they entered the room at which point the boundary of inside/outside was questioned. Derrida’s concept of the parergon (frame as threshold) is a useful reference here. He writes that when we look at a painting we take the frame to be part of the wall, yet when we look at the wall the frame is taken to be part of the painting. There is neither outside or inside, it disconcerts any opposition but does not remain indeterminate and it *gives rise* to the work (Derrida, 1987). The ‘...parergonal frame stands out against two grounds, but with respect to each of these two grounds, it merges into the other’ (Derrida, 1987). This complicates our understanding of what the work is, and what is exterior to it, but in our response to the work the boundary between what is internal to the work and what is outside of it disappears.

During this performance, the people present went back and forth. Filling in minor details about lives and people. Asking over and again what people’s

names were. They argued evidence that told them he was my son, I was his mother, and he was my child. Several major points occurred. Firstly, his name was the starting point through which people knew him. The second step was trying to ascertain who his parents were, and it seemed unsatisfactory to not know who his biological parents were. At some point, John revealed that he is Rueben's father, and it swiftly followed that Jen is his mother. They seem to go around in circles, discussing details and then coming back to trying to answer the question that I posed to them. They are concerned with where he lives, who picks him up from day care. They want to know if all four of us live together, if Simon and I live together. I don't know how to write about what occurred in the room. A lot of ground was covered, as you have read, and a delightful 'answer' reached. I wanted them to be able to confess to themselves the part that they had played in this performance. I don't know yet if they did<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> It may have happened for some of those present. In passing discussion, Albert later said (of himself) "I should be more attentive, I'm not aware of how I practice my life, I should be more attentive to how I practice my life". He said the performance made him think of a couple of other situations that he needed to "check the context on", it made him think that he needs to think more about the context of things, and that he needs to be more attentive to details, that he feels he is the typical generational 'bloke' who doesn't notice the things he thinks he should notice. In another discussion after the performance Mark asked "What if the law never arrives?" Mark also referred back to an encounter that happened during a test exhibition in Gallery 3, and the conclusion of the performance in the Bunker, when he asked me to talk about my work, both times I refused to do so. In raising both of those occasions Mark suggested that I absolutely *should* have done so. My refusal on both occasions was based on my designating myself at that moment the 'student' who did not want to talk about her work, in order to have satisfied Mark's desire that I talk, I needed to be both student and teacher at the same time (aware of my responsibility to galvanise to students the process of sharing and talking about work). In reflecting on his apparent frustration that I did not talk, I became frustrated myself. I began thinking about the relation between asking/answering, and the power relation involved. The other has a responsibility to ask for what they want, and the answerer has a responsibility to answer. If the person asking the question wants a particular answer, it changes from a question to a command, which the answerer may or may not satisfy. In this instance, if Mark desired a particular outcome (that I talk about my work) he should have said "I'd like you to say something about your work". A question ("Would you like to say something about your work?") opens the possibility of action and implies the freedom to respond as you want, and that the response will be accepted regardless. A command calls for action (or a denial) of what has been asked. Mark: "Would you like to say something about your work?" My answer was "No." (but it *could* have been yes, and he *wanted* it to be yes, but if he was disappointed in my response I suggest partial responsibility lies with him for asking a question – again implying my freedom to respond as I chose) as such the question gives the one answering the power. If a command had been given "Say something about your work." I could still answer: "No or Yes." If you ask a question you are telling the person they are free to answer in any way they want, so if you only want a certain answer, you must instead make a command, or a statement. If you give a command, you hold the power, because the only option you are giving them is to do what *you* want, or what *they* want, and if the two of you do not want the same thing, then someone is left unsatisfied. This reflection and a subsequent conversation about ethics and Levinas with my supervisor has had a profound effect on both my practice and my personal life.

In the performance, the research is being performed, or articulated for me by the other. The body of research emerges through the voice of the other; it not only reveals it to those in the room who were unaware of the ‘truth’, but it also performs the research to me from the position of the other. Witnessing this performance allows me to explicate myself from it for fleeting moments. I am still unsure what will happen when I encounter someone who thinks I have a son, and asking about him, what will I say? In the right place and time, I expect I will outline the performance. If there is not time enough, I suppose the performance will continue. If they ask me “How is Reuben?” I will simply answer the question with what I know of how he is.

It’s difficult for me at this point to bring together, in all the different parts of my practice, how this year long work fits in with the rest. I suppose it is, at the end, the ultimate example of what I believe. That I am not my name, in the same way that Reuben is not his. That a name is not a definition of the action the body it belongs to undertakes. For example, to be called mother, means neither that you are one or not. My name is the symbol, and I am (or I perform) the divine *thing*. This study of language seeks to locate the name as the bridge that carries identity from the linguistic to non-linguistic realm. This is based of course, on the idea that there is a body, and the identity is somewhere inside, or outside of this body, and that language is the key to communicating it to yourself and to others. In this research I take the position that identity is akin to ones spirit, or soul. Its *who I am*. It’s not biological (though it may be made up of some biological, social, economic factors etc), it’s spiritual. Ones identity is a mental representation, we may see what it looks like, sounds like, acts like, in its most ideal form, in the way that we perceive to be ideal, and we are continually striving to be the ideal form of our self. As we reach one way marker of that ideal form, another appears, the identity is always moving.

In this work I finally satisfied a desire to make a work that is outside of my normal inclination to practice and rehearse before I perform. Why was I finally able to do that in this performance? This seems like evidence that I am right; that this is not acting, it’s not performing, it’s not even lying, it’s just a ‘truth’. In those moments with him, I *was* his mother. The naming of me as his mother (through the mouth of the other) authorised me<sup>2</sup> in that role, and legitimised

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<sup>2</sup> As Lacan famously states “Language does not belong to us, we belong to language.” According to Slavoj Žižek “The subject of enunciation is the “I” who speaks, the individual doing the speaking; the subject of the enunciated is the “I” of the sentence. “I” is not identical to itself—it is split between the individual “I” (the subject of enunciation) and the grammatical “I” (the subject of the enunciated). Although we may experience them as unified, this is merely an Imaginary illusion, for the pronoun “I” is actually a substitute for the “I” of the subject. It does not account for me in my full specificity; it is, rather, a general term I share with everyone else. In order to do so, my empirical reality must be annihilated or, as Lacan avers, “the symbol manifests itself first of all as the murder of the thing”. The subject can only enter language by negating the Real, murdering or substituting the blood-and-sinew reality of self for the concept of self expressed in words. For Lacan and Žižek, every word is a gravestone, marking

my action as ‘truthful’ in that space.

More significant than my reflections above, is a question that this performance elucidates, and it is a question of ethics. It is a question of the responsibility an ethical subject has. The idea of ethics is bound with ideas of right and wrong, of fairness, of justice. I have said several times now, that I find myself wanting to *justify* my position. Emmanuel Levinas suggests that ethics orientate philosophy, and that responsibility comes before reasoning. Levinas uses the term “totality” to describe the egoistic self; the self of the Cartesian Enlightened subject “who thinks therefore is”. This self for Levinas is caught up in an illusion of self-certainty – a subject who feels secure, fixed and master of his world – a world that revolves around the “I” and marginalises difference. In this world difference is erased and identity equals zero (the same). However the other’s difference (your difference to mine) Levinas names as the *infinite*. Through my relation to others, my own “totalised” identity is thrown into question through the infinite differences in the world I encounter through others (you). This disruption to the stable self via our interactions with others is what produces the ethical subject<sup>3</sup>. (O’Connor, 2008)

In this performance work, the Levinasian idea of the ethical subject is present. The fact that the other legitimised my performance (of motherhood) by way of their belief in the ‘evidence’ that was performed to them shows them as an ethical subject, even in this context where the notion of ‘truth’ is abandoned. By way of their belief, I am able to live out my desire to be a mother, in which case they are taking the ultimate responsibility for my responsibility, by providing a space in which I can live this desire legitimately, but outside of ‘normal’ conventions of motherhood. The vision of me as a mother in their eyes is condition for their ethical subjectivity.

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the absence or corpse of the thing it represents and standing in for it. It is partly in the light of this that Lacan is able to refashion Descartes’ maxim “I think, therefore I am” as “I think where I am not, therefore I am where I think not” (Myers, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> For further reading see Emmanuel Levinas’ ‘Totality and Infinity’ (Levinas, 1991).





In early October I held a test exhibition in St Paul St Gallery 3. The exhibition was titled ‘Come Die With Me’. Several of the works outlined earlier were included, as well as some other works which now fall outside of the main thrust of this research and practice. The installed works embodied key concepts as named previously, that of repetition, the downward gaze, work (in relation to repetition), and extended duration. The examination exhibition titled ‘Statues’ will occur in the same space, with some of the same works and some updated or new works. My desire is to intensify the embodiments of the concepts named above, and to further heighten the relation of the Operator-Other as a partial constructor/creator of identity.

However, as emphasized in this writing, identity is construed through acts of naming as that which fills and empties (lives and dies) in the same moment as our truth in meaning. The aim for the exhibition under examination (entitled “Statues”) is for a celebration of difference in identity as the adventure that marks our creativity (our creative being). If the spatio-temporal event of “Statues” (and what I’ve uncovered in this writing and prior creative work) intensifies this paradox of being (of identity) as the shifting fluidity of meaning (emptying and filling, stabilising and moving, divining and re-presenting), then it is you (the reader/viewer/participant) who ultimately will inscribe/name/make sense of/sign for this movement. All I can really hope for is that it moves you in some way. For myself, there is more for me to question in terms of the ethical relation I have with self and other. Here ethics (although only tenuously and obliquely named in this work) is perhaps, best known so far under and in this work as adventure.





If the scene with the statues in ‘Last Year in Marienbad’ lead me to believe that *name* is that which binds, then the distinction between spoken language and written language is what suggests that it does not. Can we be both named and nameless? If the divine language (soul) can have no name, and the human language (body) names in order to communicate, then I can only suggest that we are both named and nameless in the sense that our self inhabits both the divine and the human. This play between name and nameless is activated by the calling of the name, as the human action to name is what alerts us to its very absence in the divine. While binaries between human/divine and name/nameless may appear in place, this research reveals otherwise, suggesting instead like a thousand tiny synapses connecting each time we name a person, object or thing around us. Every time we say apple, pear, table, chair, Emily, Mother; it is happening every time we speak, every time we write, when we think in language, we are spiralling through the human and the divine.

My desire in examining naming and language (both visual as in the photograph, spoken and written) was to create an openness in our understanding of ‘truth’. My intention was to find a way in which someone who would not, ordinarily be ‘allowed’ for example, to call themselves ‘Mother’ was indeed, able to do so without being considering to be lying.

I wanted to achieve this by proving that lying is not lying, but is instead part of the conditionality for performance – and further, that performance is immersed in the everyday of being with others.

However, I know it is not possible to think so without believing that in performing is truth, but therein lies the challenge to the security of my belief that lying no longer exists, in order to believe in the possibility of a truth, I still find myself thinking that things can be untrue. What I succeeded in doing, in the academic realm at least, is contemplating a radical shift in thinking that there is nothing true or untrue for certain or for the sake of stability. A human being is an evolving and irrational (as well as rational) being. Contingency, flux and change will always contaminate the desire or ideal for certain truth and untruth.



If Derrida is concerned with the text, 'text' can expand to include say, a film, image or performance, then the year long performance becomes the text which is read through the binary (Western) position of right/wrong and true/false, with the keystone moment being the performance in the bunker. After this, the people involved are capable of re-reading the 'text' (of the performance) and interrogating their memories of the 'original' truth, (which was their belief that he was my child) thereby shifting their original interpretation, and allowing them to re-imagine, and re-contextualise their memories of the performance. As one colleague, named earlier as Albert, reflected upon his biased masculinist reading – for him after the performance, sexual difference has now been complicated.

Further, it could act not only as an interrogation of this particular 'text' (performance, occasion, encounter) but filter through into other aspects of their life, which is what I was hoping for all along. So they would begin to interrogate their perceived truth of other encounters. They would also, hopefully, interrogate two other things. The first, why it is that I should or shouldn't have called myself mother, and secondly, why they seemed to accept so blindly that I'd 'lied' to them, and that this didn't go further for them to think that I might be lying *again*<sup>4</sup>. But how does this link to my other Grand/Mother work? Equally, the name Mother is disseminated through the creative practice as I give birth to my relation with my grandmother anew – I act as the Operator erasing the original birth Mother (my own Mother) in the equation of knowing my relation to my grandmother. One mother dies as another is born – so many births, re-births and small deaths are woven into the creative work as a contamination to the proper order, time, space, relation, history etc in the name of Mother. This creative practice testifies to the others' (spectator and spectrum/spectral) desire for being 'statues' forever, transforming according to the authority, contexts, desires and truths for everyday adventures.

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<sup>4</sup> Their acceptance of the new 'truth' (that I was not his mother) led them only to rest squarely on the fact that what they now presented to themselves was the truth (just as they previously did when they thought I was his mother). So, this performance was either not radical enough, or they did not come to this conclusion, or this moment came later. Perhaps, their position of acceptance in what I presented to them, both in my role as his mother, and the revelation that I am not (traditionally, technically) his mother, proves exactly what I have been trying to do by deconstructing the human language of the divine. Mother and son are just the human language words for something far more pure and divine than what can be ably understood by speaking them. In this performance, their blind acceptance initially frustrated me. I couldn't believe that it didn't occur to them that I might be lying again, or that John, Jen, Simon or Mark could be lying them in that moment, that Reuben might be the son of some entirely absent couple. But I see now, that their acceptance of it, the lack of emotion or anger displayed at having been 'lied' to, is because there was no lie, and they innately understood that mother is not something you are named, it is something you are. One could be named mother, and never be one. The eyes of the other legitimise you as a mother through action, not name.

The most impossible binary to stay in place through writing has been one of time in terms of before/after. It's been next to impossible to keep my story straight, to remember which aspects of the work I could talk about and when. I have been so much inside the performance that at times it has been difficult to explicate myself. I made the decision that I wanted this document to act as an echo of the performance that happened throughout the year, for the reader to be afforded the same, or a similar, experience to those around me. A part of me wishes that I had confessed the scope of this work up front, as it would have made it easier perhaps, to write about. I am also aware of, and challenged by, the paradox that I am attempting to communicate meaning to you via language, and that the basis of several of my (and others) arguments is that this system is inherently flawed when it comes to communicating meaning. All I can hope for is that you are able to glean something from it for yourself. I must give over my expectation of you understanding in the way that I understand in order to prevent limiting the agency of the work as an open and porous spatial condition.

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Whilst this study has seemed to be focussed on the deconstruction of the pronoun (in this case my own name Emily) I perceive there to be more ground to cover with respects to my question on history, ancestry (*ancestry*), naming and identity via the surname, the family name. That which acts as perhaps more of an identifier than the first name. The family name acts as a crypt, it is that entity which aims to carry the history of the dead. I am also aware that my understanding of Derrida and Levinas has a lot more ground to cover and in a sense of looking forward to more engagement with their work, my questions and creative practice keep alive the possibility for more thought ... more adventures ... more difference per se.

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Figure 1.	Chris Marker, Film Still from <i>La Jetee</i> .
Figure 2.	Hiroshi Sugimoto, <i>Tyrrhenian Sea</i> , Photograph.
Figure 3.	Emily O'Hara, Medium Format Negative, <i>Othello</i> #1.
Figure 4.	Emily O'Hara, Medium Format Negative, <i>Othello</i> #2.
Figure 5.	Alain Resnais, Film Still from <i>Last Year in Marienbad</i> #1: A waits on the balcony.
Figure 6.	Alain Resnais, Film Still from <i>Last Year in Marienbad</i> #2: A and X discuss the statues.
Figure 7.	Alain Resnais, Film Still from <i>Last Year in Marienbad</i> #3: The statues in question.
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Figure 9.	Emily O'Hara, Film Still, <i>Desire. No 8 (Wife Today/Gone Tomorrow)</i> #1: Cleaning the fridge.
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- Figure 21. Emily O'Hara, Film Still, Desire No. 6 (Smoke Until I Spew) #1: Lighting a cigarette.
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- Figure 23. Emily O'Hara, Film Still, Dead Dead Wine #1: fruit flies drowning in wine.
- Figure 24. Emily O'Hara, Film Stills, 16mm #1: Various stills from moments in the film, reproduced digitally via filming the projected film reel.
- Figure 25. Emily O'Hara, Film Stills, 16mm #2: I only have one letter of my own.
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- Figure 27. Emily O'Hara, Medium Format Negative, Othello #3
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- Figure 31. Bobby Neel Adams, Photographs, Family Tree
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- Figure 33. Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #1: A play on words, indicating the life now lies below.
- Figure 34. Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #2: N, the only letter my grandmother has of her own, and the year of her birth.
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- Figure 41. Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #9: The combination of the shared letters in our name, in order, uncannily, it seems to spell out a name I am called by a friend.
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- Figure 43. Emily O'Hara, Photograph of plaster model #11: Burying my self, burying a performance.
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- Figure 49. Emily O'Hara, Photographs, Desire No. 2 (The Happy Accident), Emily O'Hara, John Moffett and Reuben Sinclair.
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- Figure 54. Emily O'Hara, Photograph, *Recollection: The Porte Cochere #5*: Talking to Nicola and Rachel.
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- Figure 60. Emily O'Hara, Film Stills, *The Bunker #6*: Discussing the performance with Kathy and Simon after it ends.
- Figure 61. Emily O'Hara, Photograph, *The Bunker #7*: The location where I watched the performance unfold via a live feed.
- Figure 62. Emily O'Hara, Photograph of an installed work, *Gallery 3 test, Come Die With Me*: A veiled, shrouded figure, this work was very fleeting, it has not been discussed in this document. She may appear again, she may not.

