

# Elizabeth Orcutt

## Photography and Reflection: Images of My Self

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*Work in Progress*  
(conversion from MPhil to PhD)

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### Introduction

I make self-portraits using photography. How often does the phrase, “that’s a good picture,” really mean, “I recognise me/you in that image”? I find when I look at an image of me I sometimes wonder, who is the stranger in the picture? So I was left with the question: “What happens in the gap between me and the image of me”? This research is concerned with thinking as photographic self-imaging. The knowledge is in the self-portraiture using digital photographic technology: taking self and making self-portraiture.

At face value, mine is a solipsistic practice. We are in the era of the ‘selfie’, a behaviour that hardly existed at the outset of this project but fast became ubiquitous with the introduction the forward facing camera with the iPhone 4 in 2010 and now a genre that enjoys much censure in some quarters. I regularly encounter a barely covered sneer, when I explain what I do. The average person defaults to a pejorative notion of a Narcissistic activity. Selfie makers and me must be

‘in love’ with our own image. What we do must indicate a lack of personal integrity, a self-obsession.

In this document I will be mapping the territory of my research both theoretically and via the practice of other artists (working with photography and with themselves). I will be making a detailed description of my working method, offer some conclusions and a possible way forward to completion.

The theoretical framework takes in photography theory including but not limited to the ideas of Benjamin, Barthes and Flusser. It will cover the magic of the photographic, possession by the image, Surrealism and digital photography.

Turning to the psychology, I will outline the thinking of Kenneth Gergen in *The Saturated Self* (2000) and the difficulties I found with using a framework based on Social Constructionism. I will then examine some subjectivist theories of psychology with reference to phenomenology. Within this context I will outline theories of the self from Freud and Lacan.

I will also be considering the effect of feminist theory on my practice and where my research sits within the canon of women photographer artists picturing themselves. This leads to the final theoretical field in which I will consider the role of photographer and photography in relation to theories of performance.

I have selected a representational work from four women photographer artists in order to discuss their practices. Claude Cahun was working in the 20s and 30s with her stepsister Marcel Moore. Her images were experimental and made with Surrealist ideas in mind (Bate and Leperlier 1994). Alexis Hunter was primarily an artist who turned to the language of photography in order to speak to a “mass” audience, via a series of images which now seem well ahead of their time (Hunter, Lippard et al. 2006). Jo Spence’s highly self-documented practice, gives an overview of her metamorphosis from high-street photographer to radical via the collaborative invention of Photo Therapy.<sup>1</sup> (Spence 1986, Spence and Kuhn 2003). And finally, Helen Chadwick, who also trained as an artist and took photography from its standard contexts, added to its credibility within an art setting and rendered it 3D (Holborn 1989, Schlieker 1994, Chadwick and Warner 1996, Horlock, Martisching et al. 2004).

<sup>1</sup> I have taken this form of the term photo therapy from Spence, J. (1986). *Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political, Personal and Photographic Autobiography*, Camden Press %@ 0948491140. It is written in the truncated form, photo-therapy, on Rosie Martin’s website <http://www.rosymartin.co.uk/CV.html> and on the website for Spence’s archive [http://www.jospence.org/phototherapy/phototherapy\\_5.html](http://www.jospence.org/phototherapy/phototherapy_5.html)

I have further developed the ideas outlined in my talk “The Me in Methodology”, delivered as part of this research on February 12th 2015. I describe here the detailed “poetic score” of my practice (Coessens, Douglas et al. 2009) including but not limited to: reading, looking, selecting, making, writing, dreaming and showing, which flag up some conclusions and sign-post a way forward.

Also here are the proposed chapter headings for my contextual review and abstract for the research. I attach in a separate document an appendix of images (Appendix A), plus a plan for completion in the form of a Gantt chart (Appendix B).

### Literature Review

This section maps the territory in which my practice is sited. It covers photography theory, psychological theories of the self, feminist theory and performance theory. Some ideas, for example ideas related to ‘The Gaze’ appear in several sections. Although I have delineated these, some ideas bleed between the parts.

### Photography theory

A mechanical apparatus captures the exact trace of light falling on an object which is rendered on a light sensitive surface to make a picture: “photo” and “graph”, to draw with light. The following theorists of photography share a belief in the apparent, implicit truth in the photographic image. Baudelaire thought its exactness made it “a servant to the sciences” (Blood 1986), while for Benjamin “the presence of the original is the prerequisite

to the concept of authenticity” (Benjamin 1999). Barthes described the photograph as “never distinguished from its referent” (Barthes 1993). Sontag stated “photographs furnish evidence” (Sontag 1979) and, most recently, Mitchell states that photography has “an automatic realism and naturalism” (2006).

My thinking about photography starts from this assumption. Barthes describes the photographic punctum, the magical element of a photograph that pierces or pricks the psyche. For him it was famously found in *The Winter Garden* photograph showing mother as a child (Barthes 1993). Sontag offers a note of sadness in her critique. Photographs are always memento mori, they can “possess” the past and summon to mind their cousins, death masks (Sontag 1979). Much of her theorising about the photograph is in the analogue US modernist tradition (the photographer as detached and objective), which renders much of her thought out-dated in the digital age. Current arguments about veracity rage fiercely in the world of photojournalism dominated and moderated by the institutions based in New York (New York Times, Time, VII Agency, MOMA).

Much as Baudelaire was scathing about photography’s adoption by the “crowd” (Blood 1986), he boarded the celebrity bandwagon. He was an early adopter, his image mythologised by the Daguerreotype, which had little to do with the purely scientific use he advocated. Benjamin described the “cult value” of the photograph, mediated by the human face (Benjamin 1999). For art historian, Marcia Pointon, “an act of portrayal is bound up with anxie-

ties of betrayal”, making the photographic exact trace a seemingly apposite medium for the portrait (Pointon 2012). Writing in her book *Portraits & Persons*, philosopher, Cynthia Freeland says there need to be three requirements for a portrait: “physical delineation and indication of interior states...[and] the subject consciously presents a self to be conveyed.” (Freeland 2010) However, Tracey Emin regards *My Bed* to be a self-portrait (Tate 2014). This is a work that has not been on display for 15 years and as a result is known through photography.

Returning to Benjamin’s idea of the cult value of a photograph, I believe there is a macro cult value as well, sited within the family, a view supported by the work of Pierre Bourdieu. For him the vernacular photograph is a form of propaganda, projected via the family album, expressing the agenda of the matriarch (Bourdieu 1996). I think my difficulties with recognising my self in a photograph stem from my mother’s fantasy of me as a little girl. Anthropologist, Elizabeth Edwards goes a step further arguing that photographs are relational objects (Edwards 2005). They are inherently involved in relationship, a conduit for its vibrancy, another indication of a photograph’s limbic quality.

A great sender and receiver of picture post cards for Benjamin photographic characteristic was about its “reproducibility”. The photographic image allowed the beholder to meet an original artefact halfway (Benjamin 1999, Benjamin 2007). In this context Barthes’ photographic punctum is not passive but actively seeking a place to land. In a photograph’s exact trace there is a potential liminal quality.

By the 1920s photography had been adopted by the Surrealists. The group formally questioned the prevailing political order, and deliberately used non-traditional media, particularly the illustrated magazine sometimes with photographic collage. Bate uses the language of Semiotics and categorises the Surrealist image in three ways, first as “mimesis” as discussed earlier. Second as “prophotographic”, that is something that is believable but by which “the mimetic is frustrated.” It shows what it shows but is not actually describing the signified. And finally the “enigmatic” or what we would now call ‘surreal’. Here what is being signified is open to interpretation (Bate 2003). Szarkowski (1990) and Freund (1980) both chose to think of Surrealist photography in terms of art.

The Surrealists were particularly drawn to photography as it fitted with psychoanalytic interest in the unconscious. Automatic writing was used to access the unconscious and photography as a technical method for image making was seen to achieve the same in the visual field. “[Breton] said, the surreal image must come without volition, spontaneously, despotically” (Bate 2003). Within this framework image comes from imagination, it includes collage and montage, and is beyond mimesis.

In the digital age, the possibility of photographic mimesis is further dismantled.

Joan Fontcuberta talks of the break from the referent via binary code (Fontcuberta 2014). In my case the use of the computer collage creates a convincing *trompe l’oeil*. The final images contain elements of the mimetic (sometimes scanned negatives or possibly an iPhone self-

ie), combined into a surreal whole.

Flusser’s ideas contextualise what he calls technical images, he asks “Does Writing Have a Future” (Flusser and Amelunxen 2000, Flusser 2011, Flusser 2011)? Flusser died in 1991 and these texts were first published in the 80s, long before the internet dominated. Flusser, echoing the Surrealists, argued that images made with apparatus come from another level of consciousness and that technical images will render writing obsolete. The linear argument mediated by writing is being “supplanted by a non-linear form of composition and reading” (Flusser 2011) from technical images.

Finally for Mitchell the liminal quality is plain, as he asks “Why do [people] behave as if pictures were alive?” (photographs being a subset to his argument) (Mitchell 2006).

I think the answer could be implicit in the root of word ‘image’. In his *Keywords*, Raymond Williams (1983) explains that the origin of the words *imago* and *image* is the same, rooted in the middle ages, “there is a deep tension between ideas of ‘copying’ and ideas of the imagination and the imaginary”. The photographic holds sway in the psyche as a copying mechanism with the potential to affect thinking and feeling.

### Theories of the self - psychology theory

Initially I framed my research within Kenneth Gergen’s idea of a relational self (Gergen 2000, Gergen 2009, Orcutt 2010). It seemed likely that my confusion in relation to some images of me could be understood by his notion of fluidity of self. Gergen’s background is as a social

psychologist and he has developed the theory termed Social Constructionism. He argues for a post-modernist idea of self, that which is the experience of a multitude of selves. In the visual sphere this could be any number among identity photo (passport or work pass), Twitter avatar, family photos, images posted by friends to Facebook etc. He echoes Edwards’ notion of the relational. But in this context he is talking self in relation to others and an artefact. Gergen argues that self is not fixed but constantly changing, a self in flux and refined as time goes by.

But the more I made images, the more aware I became of my internal experience, the sensations of looking and feeling, which brought reconsideration the subjectivist and experiential schools: the ‘idiographic’ strands of psychology. Initially I had rejected a psychoanalytical framework as I found it difficult to identify with. For Freud the self is constructed of ego (I = conscious), id (it = unconscious and impetuous) and super-ego (above I = governing impetuosity). Freud’s unconscious impulses seemed too extreme and women are problematically cast as hysterics (Freud, Freud 2010, Freud 2012).

Lacan’s revision to Freud’s construct of the psyche appears more usable. Ego, “the, complete, total locus of the network of signifieds, ... the subject” (Lacan 1986) and is concealed; ideal ego, “idealization” [sic] (Lacan 1986), is the face we bring to the world and ego-ideal<sup>2</sup> is the parental, moderating ‘eye in the

sky’, the internal idealised version of identity (Leader 2014). I have a sense of internal watching. In *Living With His Camera* (2003), literary scholar, Jane Gallop describes the male/female duality of the watching, looking camera. She feels preyed upon by the external eye, looking at a picture of herself taken by her partner, Dick Blau, and says, “I find myself losing the pronoun of my subjectivity, speaking of that body not as “I” but as “her” (p3). In his talk at CREAM (University of Westminster research group) and in his book *Stealing the Mona Lisa* (Leader 2002, Leader 2014), Darian Leader, a Lacanian psychoanalyst, talks of three positions: ‘the look’, ‘to be looked at’ and ‘to make oneself looked at’. All three positions are the “subject of the look of the other”. He says, “You cannot escape a look, even from the most loving parent”.

Lacan describes the development of the idea of self in *The Stade Mirror* (Lacan and Fink 2007). An infant is playing with her reflection in a mirror. The child is at the point in her development where she is forming a sense of other; up to this point her identity is bound up with her mother’s. Everything she experiences is subjective. She sees glimpses of breast, foot, hand and her mother’s smile, an experience of her self that is fragmentary, includes other and is fluid. Seeing the whole child in the mirror allows her to understand her separateness, her identity breaks off, is explained visually and becomes fixed.

In his novel *Nausea*, Jean-Paul Sartre describes his main character’s encounter with his reflection: “The grey thing has just appeared in the mirror. It is a reflection of my



fig. i

Elizabeth Orcutt, 2012, Photographic sketch made in response to Sartre’s *Nausea* iPhone self-portrait

face.” (Sartre 2000). He describes a “trap”. I made a series of images in response to that text (fig. i). My experience is a vacuum. I deduce from this there is a complex relationship between self and the image of self or the self in the mirror. Sabine Melchior-Bonnet has written about the history of reflection. She says “In the seventeenth century, the experience of self was rooted in a clear-sighted gaze, sharpened by the mirror and the exercise of reflective thought.” (Melchoir-Bonnet 2002). Yet in the intervening years, as discussed by Martin Jay (Jay 1994), vision has been downgraded as a site of knowledge in French thinking. Even though language binds vision and understanding, for example “I see.”

### Feminist Theory

As a child of the seventies and the daughter of parents who lived their formative years in the forties and fifties. Women’s Liberation and second-wave feminism passed my family by. All of us went to private schools and many of us entered the professions, men and women

<sup>2</sup> Freud also used this term, although more commonly super-ego Freud, S. (2010). *The Ego and the Id*. LaVergne, Tenn., CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

of both mother's and father's family. There was an expectation for everyone to do the same. There was a presumed equality, and distaste for anything too socialist or radical. A good friend of my mother's, who had similar background and unusually had a job as a radiographer at the local hospital, asked if I was "one of those feminists"? She said the word with no familiarity including an alien 'e'. Yet, certainly she is a feminist.

Not only was the idea of women's equality not a part of family discourse, those kind of values belonged to others and were considered *infra dig*. I would describe it as akin to playground politics: children noticing something that is not the same as them, and organising informal tribes that excludes, a case of them and us. Feminism appeared unappealing. I assumed I was in opposition, as I liked attractive things. The debates were not for me then or in the intervening years. Thus I have been making in a feminist theory vacuum. And much like Lucy Lippard, having jumped off the roof, there is no turning back (Lippard 1995).

In the same text, Lippard maps recent feminist history and describes the reappraisal by feminist artists of the 1990s of 70s feminist art practice: my own reaction to the second wave work made by Alexis Hunter concurs (see section in Practice Review). What Lippard argues as "categorical captivity" (1995), a perceived alliance to a particular branch of feminism in denial of others, now no longer applies. This is what Amelia Jones calls *parafeminism*, what she describes as "side by side" theorising in which old ideas are incorporated, melded and then

built upon (Jones 2006). An example is a social media platform like Twitter shines a light on and democratises women's experiences. The falsely confidential nature of the media means aggressive trolls can be prosecuted and #everydaysexism is outed via a hashtag. Simone de Beauvoir's "immanence" is no longer closeted (1997). In the visual forum, Judith Butler talks of the gaze being reversed to contest male authority, "the female "Other" suddenly exposes this autonomy as illusory" (Butler 2006).

I believe I have internalised feminist thought. I resonate with Jones's definition of the *parafeminist* and this perhaps accounts for my lack of active intellectual engagement up to this point. Reading bell hooks in 2006, was revelatory although I was resistant at the outset (hooks 1994). As a woman making art, I am a feminist. This is apparent in some responses to the work I make, particularly its perceived un-commercial value, from "I couldn't sell that" to "It's just for women". Through the work I make I am a feminist killjoy, a concept coined by, and the blog title of, Sara Ahmed. Subtly the work exposes an old order and implicitly points a finger at inequality.

### Performance Theory

Photography appears to relate to performance in two ways. The image of a performance captured for posterity, what Auslander calls "documentary" but also the "theatrical" in which the subject is acting for the camera. Performance is a "contested concept" (Carlson 2003) in which I believe some kind of spectatorship is taking place and in which photography can have a symbiotic relationship.



fig. ii  
Elizabeth Orcutt, 2014,  
Male Artist #1, Self-portrait  
etchings (tronies), B320, B10,  
B2, B24, B316 (1630-1634)  
Rembrandt (1606-1669),  
Museum Het Rembrandthuis,  
Amsterdam

Practitioners have been performing in visual art before photography. Caravaggio used himself in his circular image of Medusa, held in the Uffizi collection since the C17th, a man performing as a woman. And Rembrandt, Hals and Vermeer all practiced *tronie* making either as etchings or paintings. This old Dutch word roughly means 'mug' as in mug shot or ugly mug (Janson, Hirschfelder 2008, Gottwald 2011) and there is an old French word, *trogne*, with a similar meaning. A *tronie* is a work that describes facial expression, unusual dress or type of person. I made Male Artist #1, fig. ii, based on Rembrandt's *tronie* etchings B320, B10, B2, B24, B316 (1630-1634). The effort needed to 'perform' the expressions was immense, the actions felt alien. Artist Cindy Sherman has made similar



fig. iii  
Front page of German  
newspaper, Die Welt, published  
11th December 2014  
Guest editor, artist Cindy  
Sherman

works. Recently published in and on the front page of Die Welt, Art Issue, which she guest edited and was published on 11th December 2014 (fig. iii) I propose these new images are photographic *tronies*. The images are concerned with photography and performance, (Auslander's theatrical), rather than photography of performance, (documentary). In some of these images it is not apparent which gender Sherman is playing and she has stated her practice is not about herself (Stiles 1996).

Within concepts of identity, for Judith Butler it is not only gender but sex that is performed (Butler 2006). Categorisations are conveyed via language, can be by word or picture, and when repeated over and over again establish concepts: man, woman, marriage etc. She gives and discusses as examples intersex person Hercule Barbin and drag queens, which confound stereotyping. I intend to continue making explorations of gender in my works; I have plans to make an animated Medusa based on Caravaggio.

In early therapeutic self-exploration (in my thirties) I took part in forms of psychodrama underpinned by Berne's theory of Transactional

Analysis: in which he talks about the games or personas people play (Berne 2010). I would understand Berne in terms of the idiographic previously outlined. Within Berne's thought the concepts of play and play-acting seem closely allied to ideas of self (see Winnicott in My Methodology). Photographer Jo Spence developed a therapeutic form of photography (see Jo Spence practice review).

In the introduction to *Mise en Scene* David Bate (Bate and Leperlier 1994) offers an idea which shifts the phrase away from its theatrical heritage towards an encompassing filmic one. The text is in part discussing the photography of Claude Cahun and "recognises the image as a place of work, a site of meaning and production, of precisely staging" (1994). In my case this would be self-staging.

### Practice Review

In this section I am looking at the work of four women practitioners who have used themselves in their photographic work. Each of these practices has a question at its centre about identity as a woman and personal psyche, although in each case the inquiry is constructed with differences. I have selected a representational work around which to discuss the practice of each. I have also added the selfie, the act of making a self-portrait on a smart phone and posting it to social media (Donnachie 2015).

### Helen Chadwick

*Ego Geometrica Sum* (1983, fig. iv), literally, I am geometrical, is a series of biographical, self portraits made in simplified shapes onto the facia

of which are printed various images (of the artist and objects from her life) that make narrative, snapshot sculptures. A pyramid becomes a play tent on one side and a musical triangle on another. A cylindrical sector or 3d Pac-Man is made to look like a pram. A rectangular cuboid is a front door and on an adjacent side a full length nude of the artist and so on.

The work is made from plywood with the images added photographically by a technique Chadwick developed. They are tactile, warm of hue and appear richly in sepia tones referencing an idea of nostalgia.

These pieces are self-portraits in a similar mould to Emin's *My Bed* (1998). Chadwick talked of the origins of the works being in feelings of self-alienation and the wish to do something autobiographical (Chadwick and Warner 1996). "Suppose one's body could be traced back through a succession of geometric solids..." says Chadwick in her notebook, 'and if geometry is an expression of eternal and exact trusts then let this model of mathematical



fig. iv  
Helen Chadwick, 1983,  
installation image of *Ego  
Geometrica Sum*  
(location and photographer  
unknown)

harmony be infused with a poetry of meeting and memory...in recomposed neutrality of being” (Horlock, Martisching et al. 2004).

Chadwick operated like a magpie. She collected ideas from numerous sources and then created works that are realised using photography, performance and installation. The Rococo influence of her installation *Of Mutability* (1986) was from a palace Amalienburg, a “dizzy” (Holborn 1989) dedication much like the Taj Mahal (detail, *Oval Court*, fig. v). This is a work born out of personal “reverie” (Chadwick and Warner 1996). Using her own nude body, midnight blue images made directly on the photocopier.



fig. v  
Helen Chadwick, 1986, *Of Mutability* (ICA installation), detail of *The Oval Court* (photographer unknown)

Both these pieces received some negative attention. The use of her naked body went counter to feminist discourse in the mid-Eighties. It was considered that the use of the nude perpetuated the objectification of women. This could be a too simplistic reading of the work. As the maker and the model in the piece,

Chadwick collapses the subject and the object. Her intention was a piece that described desire. She desires and is desired: a desire democracy.

Chadwick was sufficiently sensitive to this criticism to move away from showing her embodied self and in later work she used her body at a cellular level, her eggs, *Nebula* 1996, and in the *Viral Landscapes* (1988-89).

### Jo Spence

I think this a howl of a practice: part fury, part sadness and part frustration.

On p183 of her book “Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political, Personal and Photographic Autobiography” (1986), I see a rectangle, quartered into four images of a woman<sup>3</sup> (fig. vi). Spence appears naked but is wrapped by something dark around her chest. She is also wearing a cheap tulle veil with a chain-store type diamanté tiara and carrying in three of the images a bunch of four white lilies. The lighting is low key and the images are not easy to see (this could be the book reproduction) and she is engaging with the camera/viewer in each picture.

In the four images the woman is displaying a different expression: in the first she appears half smiling with her face averted, she could be described as demure, acquiescent, pleased or smug. In the second she is looking in surprise. Her hand is cupping her left eye, which is in shadow. Her right eye and mouth



fig. vi  
Jo Spence, date unknown, *The Bride*

are opened in an expression of shock. In the third picture her eyes remain wide but the lilies are swapped into her left hand and her right hand is on her face, her palm muting her mouth. In the final image she is screaming, one arm wrapped around her head and her right hand touching her left temple.

These pictures are the result of a photo therapy session by Spence (working in collaboration with Rosy Martin). In these sittings the poser, was “reframing” “past histories”. Spence goes on to say, “Anything potentially can be turned on its axis, words and images can take on new and different meanings and relationships and old ideas can be transformed” (1986).

In her book, Spence describes her struggle with her identity. Her skill, intellectual and artistic, sat uncomfortably with her working class roots. In addition, her mother was frightened by her sexuality and she in turn was affected by her mother’s disapproval. She describes a form of repression by being imprisoned in suburbia, her family emotionally blackmailing her to remain within the home. Her talents took her

<sup>3</sup> Image 4, bottom right, appeared on the cover of *Spare Rib* magazine in February 1986 with the coverline “Cancer Exposed”. In that issue Spence had an article “The Picture of Health” on “powerlessness” (p11)

along a career path into the middle class, which over time morphed into a questioning eye and rejection of photographic norms. She describes vividly the “contradictions” between her political beliefs and the work she made as a high street and documentary photographer. During her years at PCL (now University of Westminster) she was exposed to photography theory, the work of Barthes, Freud and Kristeva, when the course was lead by Victor Burgin (I myself attended ten years later).

Eventually, “The ethical problems of my assumed right to photograph others was placed squarely on the agenda... and I became convinced that people would be better off taking their own pictures.” (Spence 1986) and in collaboration she invented photo therapy that served to gather together the different stands of her life in order to re-work them. She became her own subject and she rebelled against the stereotyping of women in photography. She made images that did not fit standard contexts or aesthetics.

### Alexis Hunter

In 2006, Norwich School of Art and Design held a show of the work of Alexis Hunter, called *Radical Feminism in the 1970s*. The works in the exhibition were Hunter’s photographs made as a departure to painting (a deliberate choice of medium to appeal to a large audience) and had not been shown for thirty years. Hunter used herself as the model in many of the images, reflecting in 1997 she said, “For feminist artists ‘the personal is political’ was one of the most important slogans of the 1970s. Being subjective as women in our work was



fig. vii  
Alexis Hunter, 1977, *Approach to Fear XIII: Pain - Destruction of Cause*

the bravest and most radical thing we could do at the time” (Hunter, Lippard et al. 2006).

Hunter’s hand holds a burning, silver platform shoe in the images of *Approach to Fear XIII: Pain - Destruction of Cause* (fig. vii). Her nails are painted and she is wearing a delicate hippyish necklace wrapped around her wrist. I can recall having a similar chain (I was 14 in 1977 when the series was made, so it must have been a cheap, mass market item). Today I read the piece as a critique of the ‘fascism of fashion’. High heels hurt after a while, particularly when standing, the balls of your feet become excruciating, as anyone who wears them will know.

By scale and the use of her own hands Hunter places the viewer in the place of the maker, “they could be your own” she says. As the viewer you adopt the space of the author: the woman who is burning her painful shoes. And as a woman you become the looker rather than the looked at. As a man you can adopt the position of a woman, Butler’s

reversal of ‘The Gaze’. It is a neat conceit. Lucy Lippard expands Hunter’s intention, “she was opposing the schizophrenic role-playing expected of women artists as active image makers and passive images: as workers and models; as “one of the boys” and “only a girl” (2006).

Nearly 40 years on the piece has not dated. It could easily have been made yesterday. The dress and visual language seem contemporary. The viewpoint adopted by Hunter is exactly that of the camera phone. We are shooting and posting our eye’s view in shops and restaurants: a series of “Shall I buy these shoes?” and “This is my crepe Suzette” picture messages that emanate from smart phone to social media platforms. In those intervening decades we appear to have internalised Hunter’s message, and developed the technology. Adrian Forty (1986) believes that technological advance is driven by demand, rather than invention.

### Claude Cahun

“I AM IN TRAINING DONT [sic] KISS ME” (fig. viii) (Cahun and Moore 2006) is handwritten, with the outline of a pair of lips underneath, on what appears to be a white long-sleeved T-shirt worn by the artist. She is balancing a barbell across her lap. Under her left hand, written on one of the shot-bearing balls are the words TOTOR & POPOL, thought to be early characters of the bande dessinée artist Herve, later author of Tintin. The other ball appears to say AS-TOR. Nipples are also drawn on the white shirt. She wears dark shorts, a white scarf and leggings with a heart drawn on the thigh.



fig. viii  
Claude Cahun, 1927, I am in  
Training Don't Kiss Me

Cahun's make-up looks white. Her lips are dark shaped in an exaggerated sweetheart, she has dark hearts on each cheekbone and her hair is slicked back and with a kiss-curl above each eye. She has applied eye-shadow right up to the brow. The eyelashes of the lower lid have been drawn onto the face and resemble a Venus flytrap. I read many of the elements as symbols of love and romance.

There are other images with Cahun wearing the same clothes. It is possible the shirt and leggings are underwear combinations. She is also wearing long dark, patent leather cuffs, which are hardly apparent in this the most well known image, and matching spats. In these other images the barbell is undecorated.

This is a woman who appears to be saying, "Look and don't touch." She is a combination of allure and aloofness. She is inviting a kiss and challenging the advance.

Strictly speaking this is not a self-portrait, although the oeuvre is generally attributed to Cahun. She became close to her stepsister

Marcel Moore as a teenager before their parents' marriage, and it is assumed that the two were lovers. They set up home together and lived together in Jersey. Their art was a collaboration for which Cahun receives credit. Cahun attended the Sorbonne in Paris (Cahun and Moore 2006), became interested in psychology, friends with Breton and allied herself to the Surrealist principles and aesthetics, with their "fascination for social transgressions, disruptive poetics, revolutionary politics and the unconscious" (Bate and Leperlier 1994). This image particularly is challenging the "woman-object" of the "man-subject" (1994) order of things. Although artist and academic David Bate wrote the foreword to an exhibition catalogue that features Cahun's work (Bate and Leperlier 1994), his Surrealist survey of photography does not mention her

### The Selfie

Kim Kardashian had dinner with her grandmother on Easter Saturday. We know because she posted the image to her picture blogging account Instagram. Some hours later the image had received over 3/4 of a million "likes". Kim has nearly 30 million followers.

From data analysed from posts in 2013 Kim Kardashian made 216 selfies, which awarded her fifth place in the Instagram selfie league: first was her half-sister Kylie Jenner (451). Another member of the Kardashian clan, Kendall was fourth with 236. The percentage of selfies posted to Instagram is 11 percent, while on Twitter it is 2 percent.

Kim is seen as the selfie queen; a Google search returns a fifth more pages than her top rated half-sister

Kylie. Kardashian posts images of 'shading' (her preferred method of applying foundation to give definition to her features), tips for the best angle of the shot and the use of app Perfect365, which allows retouching (giving perfect, smooth skin and eyelashes). Technology in the form of the camera phone and available apps allow the look of a model in magazine. Recently Kim has described her selfie making as "ridiculous" (EOnline 2014) and I believe its purpose is to fuel her famous-for-being-famous persona.

Katie Warfield has researched the selfie phenomenon in a group of Canadian girls aged 16-28, using qualitative methodology, with the research questions:

1. On what occasions and in what circumstances do young women take selfies?
2. How do young women describe the various stages of the phenomenon of selfies? (Warfield 2014)

Her findings define three distinct themes: the self-conscious thespian, the model and the #realme in the mirror. What she defines as digital subjectivities at once body-focused and also subjective.

### Methodology

The metaphor for my practice is "Pick'n'Mix" which stems from the idea of a bricolage or DIY methodology (Barrett 2010). Roughly I have a bank of images from which to choose and these I reassemble digitally as a collage. The different pieces make a new image. The method is playful, childish and above all, all about my self. I would describe the process as creative, highly biographical and super-subjective.

Winnicott (2005) describes play and the space of creativity as the site of "potential space". Within "potential space" there are two elements functioning at the same time: the inner world (which is governed by the health of the child's relationship to its mother) and the actual, external reality.

If I look at the image of me from



fig. ix  
Photographer unknown,  
c1972, First Holy Communion  
of Elizabeth Orcutt, aged  
approx. 8

my First Holy Communion (fig. ix), I realise that I have forgotten my catechism, all that remains is how I look, a girl of 8, dressed as a bride. As a child, raised as a Catholic, the imperative was to be a good woman, which really meant wife and mother and was reinforced by the images of the Madonna. All those ideas are collapsed into that image of my self as a first communicant. Faced with the image of myself in that guise and with all those associations the natural step for me is to project my face onto the Madonna images. If I am supposed to be that ideal then I will be (fig. x)



fig. x  
Elizabeth Orcutt, 2011,  
Mother Series #2, The Litta  
Madonna, 1490, Vinci, Leonardo  
da Vinci (1452-1519), Hermitage,  
St Petersburg, Russia / The  
Bridgeman Art Library

This projection of one image onto another is cinematic and Zizek would argue is about my desire (Fiennes 2007). However, this appropriation of images is at once audacious, childish and it turns out therapeutic for my relationship with my mother (Winnicott 2005). In that intervention I had made a series of images of me that manifest the potential space as real. The images are made using digital photographic technologies offering a convincing trompe-l'oeil collage that disappears into the original media.

If I further break down what I am doing "The 'poetic' score" is

*Reading: thinking and forgetting  
Looking, meditating and glimpsing  
Sorting and selecting*

*Making, combining and discarding  
Daily musing and writing  
Dreaming, clearing*

*Showing*

These discrete stages are what Coessens etc (Coessens, Douglas et al. 2009) call the marks on the page that describe the output.

Although I cannot read and make simultaneously, these tasks act upon each other in pursuit of realising the works and the knowledge. The making and reflection/dissemination is what is described as a way of thinking 'inside' one's actions "in which the subjective can be observed as if it were objective" (Coessens, Douglas et al. 2009). This is further explained as "exploring more intensely, more deeply the phenomenon at hand" (Coessens, Douglas et al. 2009).

This process will be logged as I work in a daily diary, logging process and progress, giving a structured forum for reflexive and reflective comment. This route will be circular and layered, with advancement coming from "mindfully holding theory in consideration of the visual message" (Sullivan 2009). The knowledge will stem from the practice with the practice as the illuminating factor. The learning will be found in the making (Sullivan 2009). Warfield's selfie makers talk of a golden moment of authenticity of self (Warfield 2014).

### My Practice Review Reading and forgetting

I gather books; usually from specialist art bookshops or museums. I collect randomly but rarely artists' monographs. The books I own are classic texts or something that seems academically relevant to my practice: philosophy, self-portraiture, psychology of the self, etc.

I like to own books because of my forgetfulness. I read, I understand and what I've understood evaporates. Thus repetition is present in much of my practice: from looking and re-looking, to reading and re-reading.

Under performing in traditional academic exams, encouraged me to think my poor memory was a failing. However, in her book *The Art of Memory*, Frances Yates (1992) describes how the Ancient Greeks created a scheme for the mind, this was a pre-print era when a good memory was vital. The method utilised contemporary architecture, imagery and repetition and various systems were used for centuries. It is a relief to know that memory and image were so closely allied in the past.

Walter Benjamin worked by gathering information. He wrote lists in his notebooks, collected toys, postcards, all manner of things that fed his passion: collecting and assembling was part of his process (Benjamin 2007). The photographer Martin Parr works in a similar fashion, a magpie for quirky stuff and views, from tea trays stored in his attic (Barker 1992) to photo-booth images taken while travelling on assignment (Parr and Heiferman 2000).

My reading is also a form of collecting or harvesting and can be targeted and random. I have method of tabbing the books, and then I'll make a diagram of what is relevant. The tabs are of single word prompts: mime, animism, "to be looked at" and the like. When I return to the text, often what I find is a surprise.

#### Looking: gazing or glimpsing

My art practice has grown out of my family's picture archive (Fava 2005). The photographs were kept in an old shoebox in the bottom drawer of my mother's desk, which was in the dining room; a space not much used. As a child I would sit hidden from view and look through the images. Mostly the pictures were still in wallets from the mini-lab

and filed with no particular system. To see the images I needed to take them out of the envelope and leaf through the prints in a series of glimpses.

In recent years, since 2007, I have been working at a newspaper organising the photographic content. On a busy day I would glance through approximately 20,000 images, assembled in groups of 18 images per screen. With practice I could scan a page in just over a second and hit advance, tapping lento (that's 40 beats per minute). This glancing behaviour has been a part of my life.

I now care for the family archive material and have attempted to enforce some order on it. I have archival photo folders and the prints and negatives are filed roughly chronologically. I recently found more material the existence of which I had forgotten even though I placed it there 10 years ago.

Throughout my life I have looked at the pictures again and again. I still do. When I'm stuck with my practice I return to those images: often find something that I have overlooked or seem newly relevant.

This fascination with image continued into my life. As a teenager I devoured women's magazines, held and disappointed by the glamour of the photography and glossiness of the pages. I rarely read the text; it was the photographs that attracted me. Like the family images I would look again and again, flipping through the pages and glancing at the pictures.

At the same time I had a fascination with my face. I would enact long, questioning looks, closely observing my skin and features, an act reminiscent of the scrutiny of sheltie



fig. xi  
Elizabeth Orcutt, 2012, 6 x photographic sketches mad in response to Sartre's Nausea iPhone self-portraits

making. I plucked my eyebrows into an arched, narrow surprise. I rehearsed again and again the application of make-up. The looking was a searching and came up blank; as empty for me as the magazines. Much like Sartre in *Nausea*, "I can understand nothing about this face. Other people's faces have some significance. Not mine" (Sartre 2000).

I will also look at an exhibition in these two ways: make a glancing overview and then return to the some pieces for a longer look.

Now when I make a piece I stare at it, a long slow look. I am looking for meanings within the piece. What does it say? Does it articulate my intention?

#### Sorting and Selecting

Pictures of me appear in various contexts as described before (ID, avatar etc.). As described by Gergen (2000), a world where the pictures of me and my self or selves are legion, various and multiplying.

When sorting images if something catches my eye in the family archive, I will put it to one side in order to take a longer look. This is rather like dealing a pack of cards. Each selection will be a hand and within each will be found a different meaning and strength. What Sullivan (2009) calls thinking in

a language from the semiotic and hermeneutic traditions, in this instance of the language of images of my self. Sometimes the group of images do not have the potential for new meaning and I will reject them. The images appear to direct the choices that I make. Artist and researcher, Patricia Townsend, described another photographer's process as an 'unconscious' edit in her conference paper, *Playing and Photography* (2014).

Disorder is vital to the task. Early in this investigation I sorted the family archive into chronological order. Now when I am selecting there is less to do and none of the excitement of discovery. Since I re-discovered the remainder of the archive, still in its original state I have lost the sense of naughtiness that was once associated with looking.

And my selection criteria? Will it work? Does it tell the story? What is the story? Is it the best image? What do I want to say? A series of questions in a deductive, Socratic vein.

#### Making, combining and discarding

In December 2012, I was thinking about what constitutes the self and reading widely and randomly, making a start at mapping the theoretical field. I had a sketchy knowledge of Sartre and Existentialism. When reading *Nausea* (2000), I identified with the passage where the main character gets "trapped" in his own reflection and thought it lent itself to a photographic description. These are the first selfies I made with my iPhone 4, fig. xi (Orcutt 2012). At the time, I was unaware of the selfie as an embryonic cultural phenomenon. My practice felt stalled and I thought I needed to do something, anything, in order to move on. I was working

at *The Times* and a colleague had mentioned that there was really no need to have proper camera kit anymore. I used the iPhone camera and processed the images into black and white with a rounded edge black border. The smart phone camera allowed me to make an examination of hidden angles of my face. I had moved back into the headspace of a teenager. The most successful image shows me peering into/out of the rectangle of the frame. The face is abstracted; I can make out an eye, nostrils and lips.

During the second attempt (Dec '12) I rejected all the images but I can now see a progression. There is one image showing an out of focus close up of my eye. I had moved on and was thinking about the relationship of sight to perception, fig. xii (Orcutt 2012). I was reading Simon Ings book *The Eye: A Natural History* (2008). I made many sketches figs. xiii, xiv, xv (Orcutt 2012, Orcutt 2013, Orcutt 2013) with the iPhone, sometimes with the generic Camera app other times experimenting with Hipstamatic. Eye upon eye upon eye.

I had continued the practice of moving the camera in examination of the eye. Sometimes I would make images in which I was looking away and sometimes the eye would be engaging with the camera. This practice was as much about mastering the camera and uncovering the technical practice as making the images.

Initially I believed these images had achieved nothing but simply technical exploration and play. Now I look at them again I can see some have an engaging quality. The ones in which the eye is looking to the camera. The images are like looking in a mirror and I look for a long time. This forces my mind to fill time,

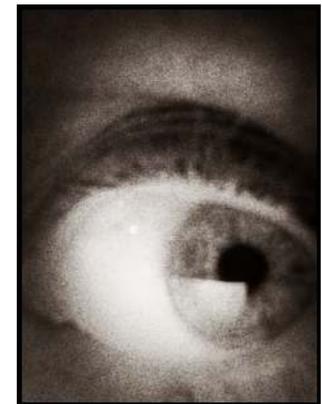


fig. xii  
Elizabeth Orcutt, 2012, Photographic sketch of my eye made in response to Sartre's Nausea iPhone self-portrait

ask questions, and start to make a story. I will return to these and experiment some more.

Still considering the eye as a potential gateway, I found Alison Gopnik's TED talk about how babies think. Her research indicates that babies have fantastically elastic, creative brains; what she calls "The R&D department" to the human race (Gopnik 2011). I started thinking about how a baby sees. At the time I had forgotten my Lacan but I came up with an idea very similar to his explanation of the fragmented self.



fig. xiii  
Elizabeth Orcutt, 2013, Grid of 12 photographic sketches of my eye iPhone self-portraits



fig. xiv  
Elizabeth Orcutt, 2013, 3 x  
photographic sketches of  
my eye iPhone self-portraits  
made with Hipstamatic app

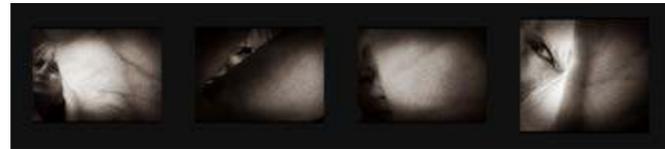


fig. xvii  
Elizabeth Orcutt, 2013, 4  
x photographic sketches  
made in response to Alison  
Gopnik's TED talk What Do  
Babies Think?  
iPhone self-portraits

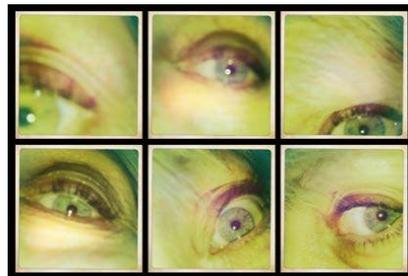


fig. xv  
Elizabeth Orcutt, 2013, 6 x  
photographic sketches of  
my eye iPhone self-portraits  
made with Hipstamatic app

I photographed myself with the iPhone as I imagined a baby would see, fig. xvi (Orcutt 2013).

The final stage of this experimenting with iPhone and a kind of selfie making came from the grids of eyes. I realised I could plot the iPhone examination of my face into a 'Cubist' articulation, if I placed images of my features in an approximation of where they sit in my face, figs. xvii, xviii, xix, xx (Orcutt 2013, Orcutt 2013, Orcutt 2013). I am unhappy with the colour casts I achieved using the Hipstamatic app. Each time I made some images I would get a different skin tone. I will revisit this practice.

Also I was losing the idea of puzzlement that seemed to me implicit in the Sartre words and Gopnik research. I wanted a discernible face in combination with a degree of abstraction. I came up with an idea for an interactive piece that runs on a touch screen. It is a square grid

of 9 images that describes my face. As individual images are tapped they enlarge to fill the screen, touch again the grid of nine reappears, fig. xxi (Orcutt 2014). There is an element of animation as expressions change (mouth smiles, tongue sticks out, eyes laugh or are angry). I am satisfied with the piece.



fig. xviii  
Elizabeth Orcutt, 2013, Grid  
of twelve images that describe  
my face iPhone self-portraits  
made with Hipstamatic  
app

The individual images need to be more abstracted see fig. xii (Orcutt 2013). And I would like to try it on a larger screen, so the images dominate the viewer. I wish to experiment further with an idea of a self with whom to interact.

Recently professional life has been indistinguishable from practice. I am using an iPhone and making work seated at the computer.



fig. xix  
Elizabeth Orcutt, 2013, Grid  
of nine images that describe  
my face iPhone self-portraits  
made with Hipstamatic app

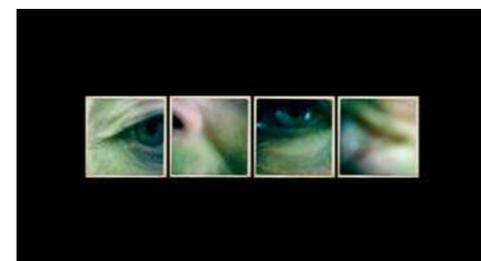


fig. xx  
Elizabeth Orcutt, 2013, four  
photographic images that  
describe my eyes  
iPhone self-portraits made  
with Hipstamatic app



fig. xxi  
Elizabeth Orcutt, 2013, Grid  
of nine photographic images  
that describe my face  
iPhone self-portraits made  
with Hipstamatic app

### Musing and writing

Writing is never easy, I will stare into space like Chadwick's reverie (Chadwick and Warner 1996) and do anything except write. My thoughts explode like a badly orchestrated fireworks display. My ideas are random, of different shapes and texture and rarely link. I have to write without worrying about the sense. A linear, organised argument seldom exists in the initial phase.

When I was at my kindergarten the teacher was called Mrs Traynor. We used to practice our writing on tracing paper clipped to cursive worksheets; where the letters were overlaid against triple lines. We'd practice our "fish hooks", loops that touch both the top and bottom of the template. I found this difficult and was often in trouble for my poor attention and application. The tracing paper always slipped, my work looked a mess and I recall trying and pressing down very hard. I would hold my breath and always felt I had failed. Later I found my report from her. Her thoughts seemed as ill formed as her own handwriting. The scrawl did not belong to the enormous, shaming presence in my

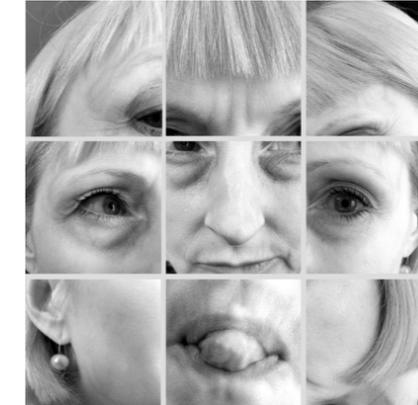


fig. xxii  
Elizabeth Orcutt, 2014, Selfie  
Series Face app Still image grab

memory. Now I work exclusively on the computer. From making notes, to making work, to writing. Observed from the outside both the making and the disseminating look the same.

I write an online diary via a site called 750words. It is a tool designed to form the habit of writing three pages everyday. The website is neatly designed and the interface highly satisfying. At midnight a fresh webpage is launched and the previous day is locked. It assists with organising my thoughts and expressing them as linear strands. I sometimes work regularly but the habit is difficult to stick. I would prefer to make work without dissemination and notes.

### Clearing and dreaming

This is a form of detaching, moving outside of my Cartesian viewpoint. From Gergen (2000) it would be described as shifting from the Romantic to the Modern. I am operating from the inside out and wish to shift my viewpoint; look from the outside in. Sullivan talks about this duality between the switching from subject to objective as problematic and proposes a third state a liminal or "in between" space (Sullivan 2009). I intend to further investigate this.

Sometimes I am in a situation where I am feeling overwhelmed by 'thinking', I stop being able to see the 'wood for the trees'. My mind is crowded with pictures, ideas and theories. I need to detach and clear my mind, there is apparently no room for understanding or creativity (Winnicott 2005, Coessens, Douglas et al. 2009).



fig. xxiii  
Elizabeth Orcutt, 2013,  
Abstract photographic image  
showing my eye iPhone  
self-portraits made with  
Hipstamatic app

I can also spend time in dreaming; this is usually while staring out of a window. My body is still and peaceful and my mind blank, open to narrative. I first recall this state of mind from story time as a child. At my boarding preparatory school we would have story time every Sunday night. A hundred boys and girls dressed in their pyjamas would crowd, higgledy-piggledy like puppies in the headmaster's study. It is from this experience I am aware of the mental space for imagination: images or ideas will pop into my head. I am now aware that narrative »



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Mother Series #1  
(self-portrait based on  
Italian mother and baby in New York City,  
c.1898 Riis, Jacob August, 1849-1914,  
Private Collection / Peter Newark American  
Pictures / The Bridgeman Art Library  
Copyright © Elizabeth Orcutt 2011)



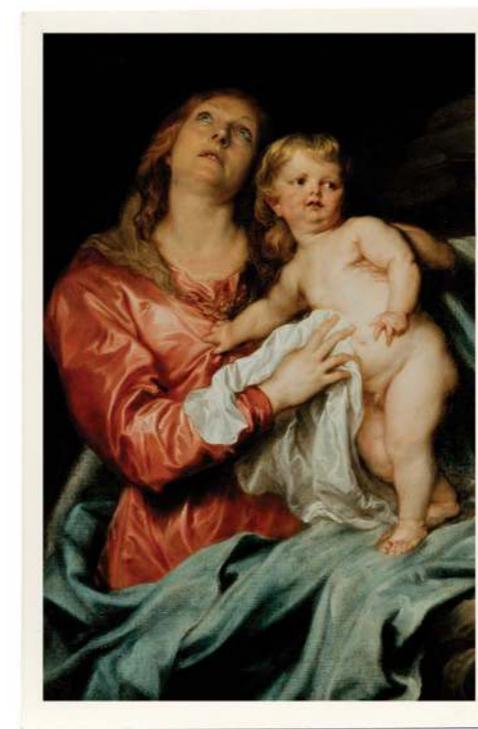
Mother Series #2  
 (self-portrait based on The Litta Madonna,  
 1490 Vinci, Leonardo da, 1452-1519,  
 Hermitage, St Petersburg, Russia /  
 The Bridgeman Art Library  
 Copyright © Elizabeth Orcutt 2011)



Mother Series #4  
 (self-portrait based on Migrant Mother, Febru-  
 ary or March 1936 Lange, Dorothea, 1895-1965,  
 US Library of Congress Farm Security  
 Administration - Office of War Information  
 Photograph Collection  
 Copyright © Elizabeth Orcutt 2011)



Mother Series #5  
 (self-portrait based on Portrait of mother  
 and child Cameron, Julia Margaret, 1815-1879,  
 Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK /  
 The Stapleton Collection / The Bridgeman  
 Art Library  
 Copyright © Elizabeth Orcutt 2011)



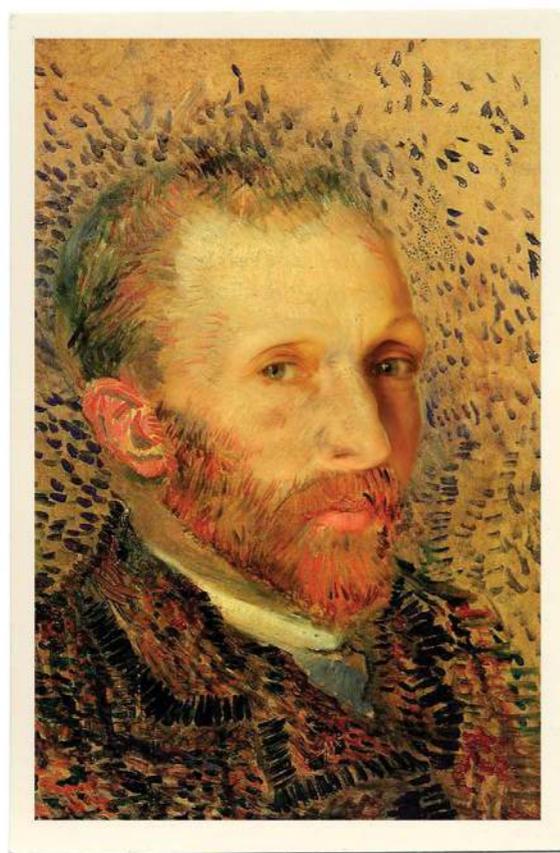
Mother Series #8  
 (self-portrait based on Madonna and Child  
 Dyck, Sir Anthony van, 1599-1641,  
 Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, UK /  
 The Bridgeman Art Library  
 Copyright © Elizabeth Orcutt 2011)



Mother Series #9  
 (self-portrait based on Madonna and Child  
 Allori, Alessandro, 1535-1607, Palazzo Pitti,  
 Florence, Italy / The Bridgeman Art Library  
 Copyright © Elizabeth Orcutt 2011)



Male Artist #1  
 (digital self-portrait based on Self-portrait  
 etchings (tronies), B320, B10, B2, B24, B316,  
 1630-1634, Rembrandt, 1606-1669, By kind  
 permission of Museum Het Rembrandhuis,  
 Amsterdam  
 Copyright © Elizabeth Orcutt 2014)



Male Artist #2  
 (digital self-portrait based on Self-portrait,  
 1887 van Gogh, Vincent, 1853-1890, By kind  
 permission Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam /  
 Vincent van Gogh Foundation  
 Copyright © Elizabeth Orcutt 2013)



Face Series App #1  
 (still from interactive self-portrait)  
 copyright Elizabeth Orcutt 2014



Face Series 7b  
(black and white composite selfie made with  
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# Mandy and Me

By Elizabeth Orcutt

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I remember seeing the film Mandy (d: Alexander Mackendrick, 1952) for the first time when I was around eight or nine. One sequence, two discrete images, condensed my reaction and has remained with me since, leaving a persisting wraith of sorrow.

Caged behind a mesh of chicken wire, a girl child's face - eyes confused and face frowning - is resting on her forearm. She is framed by a hole in a back-yard wall: she looks from inside the home to the world outside, into a street in a non-descript post war town where other children are playing. This image, the film stills or short sequence has stayed with me since I first saw the film in the 70's.

Sunday afternoons in my childhood were usually empty. My parents would be resting or busy with jobs, my sister reading and me, I was "bored". I would watch the Sunday matinee; it was the early seventies. I remember being grief-stricken, heart aching, by Mandy's story although I was unable to make sense of my feelings at the time and at that young age emotional hangovers don't hang around long. Watching the film earlier this year I was reminded of the bewildering emotion and all those other times

when intensity of feeling inappropriately outweighs the situation. The preparatory school me had identified strongly with the isolated little girl in the film, I was she and she was me. The connection I feel with that picture of Mandy in her grandparent's yard is pure fiction, a teleportation of myself immediately into and out of that image.

In her analysis of the same film, critic Annette Kuhn describes a similar experience, with the past intruding inappropriately into the present, literally unearthing an ancient reaction to the piece. Referring to herself in the third person, Kuhn says:

*"It is the mid 1980s: Annette is in a Soho wine bar with a woman friend, also a film critic. Somehow the topic of Mandy enters the conversation, and the two women chat for a while about the film, in the way people who enjoy cinema, and enjoy ideas about cinema, do. Suddenly Annette burst into tears.*

*If the memory passed in ruefully understanding laughter, it was certainly an odd one. The tears had come unbidden and insistent, from some part of Annette that was decisively not the film scholar, nor even the cinephile. The grownups'*

*conversation had been interrupted by something inappropriate and other – a child’s response, troubling and impossible to ignore. The little Annette had at last successfully waylaid the adult, forcing some difficult questions on to the agenda.” (Kuhn, 1995, 27)*

Back in my own present: re-reading Kuhn’s Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination, re-watching the film and re-visiting the connection with the character Mandy gave me a pointer to understanding my preoccupation with the terminally ill children, whose lives I had been recording for the Chain of Hope, a medical charity based in Luxor, Egypt. In 2001 I spent a week working alongside and documenting the staff and volunteers. But I found myself similarly, deeply affected by that trip.

The charity treats children, some with quite simple heart defects that are often treated in utero in the West. In Egypt although there is the medical talent to deal with these problems but there is little resource for the necessary specialist training and facilities. So the children who came to the Luxor clinics were part of a life or death lottery. Left untreated these congenital defects are fatal by the time the child reaches adolescence. The families were well aware of the probable outcome. Mostly under 10, the children often had an alarmingly grey pallor from cyanotic heart disease. Some had the typical clubbing of fingers and toes and occasionally they performed the classic squatting, to relieve their breathlessness. In desperation, some Palestinian families had travelled on a bus from Gaza, 24 hours along the banks of the Nile,

with an anxious hold-up at the Israeli border, which added more delay.

However, I was mystified by my reaction to those families facing the loss of a child. My response was more than a simple case of imagining how their situation might feel but an intense empathy. Those live tableaux provoked a grief – including disbelief, sadness and anger – that seemed larger, deeper than could be expected from someone who was “only” a visitor.

As is often the case for adults of my age and nationality, my most significant experience of loss was the death of my grandparents. I knew them all and they died in fairly quick succession, one every year, around the time I saw the film Mandy. We did not live close to either set of grandparents. We would spend limited time with them as an extended family group: summer or Christmas holidays and family parties. They were kindly, distant, old people to me.

In her introduction to *On Death and Dying*, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross describes how past generations were more accustomed to death and as a result how we are now even more distanced from it.

*“Widespread vaccination has practically eradicated many illnesses, at least in western Europe and the United States. The use of chemotherapy, especially the antibiotics, has contributed to an ever-decreasing number of fatalities in infectious diseases. Better child care and education have affected low morbidity and mortality among children. The many diseases that used to take an impressive toll among the young and middle-aged have been conquered.” (1973, p1)*

My parents – particularly my mother, who was devoted to my grandmother – were affected by their parents’ deaths. I was unaware of anything unusual at the time. My mother saw it as her duty as a nurturer to protect my sister and me from ‘bad’ feelings such as sadness. Kübler-Ross (writing when I was ten) describes my parents’ attitude quite accurately.

“Death is viewed as a taboo, discussion of it is regarded as morbid, and children are excluded with the presumption and pretext that it would be “too much” for them.” (6) And Kübler-Ross goes on to suggest that that approach can give a child “unresolved grief”. I would not say that I was a universally miserable child. But I remember not being happy. I felt I rarely got things right for others and this grieved me. I had the mantra, “What’s wrong with me?” running round my head.

So my Luxor experience, seemingly prompted by the children’s plight, left me wondering what death meant in today’s world. I had little familiarity with it, although no real fear of it. But what was it about death that so repelled people to the point of denial? My research took me to the work of various artists, shows and texts: from studies of autopsies by Sue Fox (considered alarming enough to be on restriction in the University library) and Andres Serrano, via the catalogues of post mortem photography, *Le Dernier Portrait*, at the Musee d’Orsay and *The Dead* at the National Museum of Film, Television and Photography in Bradford. I ordered books – like *The Natural Death Handbook* and a cardboard casket from it. I wandered around cemeteries and nagged my parents to think about

their own passings and any wishes or arrangements they might like. I immersed myself in death and its literature. I found I was engaged by the imagery and interested by the texts yet I got no closer to the feeling and the explanation of it.

I was left cold. The common thread seemed to be intensity of feeling, the brew of bereavement.

So it wasn’t the potential death of the children that was touching me. It was what a child meant to those families and the mesh of relationship that is threatened, exposed under such conditions. The families made a picture of devotion and feeling which was strikingly significant to me. Somehow I was transferring the child I carry with me onto those tableaux of dutiful families that were all around the Luxor hospital. I was projecting myself onto the scene.

Projection is the psychological process that involves the attribution of unacceptable thoughts, feelings, traits or behaviours to others that are characteristic of oneself (Sandler 1989; Clark 1998). Whereas in transference the therapist or others are experienced as having the same attributes as significant others, in projection is the disowned aspects of self that are ‘transferred’ onto the other. (Grant & Crowley, 2002, 18). The key part of this definition for me in relation to the Luxor families is the disowning of something personal and unbearable. What I needed to do was look at myself in relation to my own family and examine the sense of bereavement that I hold within my younger self. The family photograph then becomes the key, the artefact through which to re-visit those places.

My family’s early years archive of photographs is kept in a corrugated cardboard box, the type for storing hanging files. When I was a child, it lived in a stationery box in the bottom drawer of my mother’s desk. My love of the photographic image was born with those clandestine moments spent looking through the photos. There was something naughty about the act, bound up as it was with the privacy of my mother’s intimate possessions. Crouched on the carpet, I never tired of looking again and again at those familiar images. I always expected to see something new and was I reassured and comforted that I did not.

Like the image of Mandy, these photographs can transport me back to that time. By looking through that cardboard box of those family photographs, I found a discrepancy between what I remembered and what the pictures were showing. As I searched that box of images I was disquieted by their familiarity and unfamiliarity: a condition that gave me a strong sense of déjà vu.

One of my earliest memories is having a picnic in a field with my nanny, Marion, my mother and my sister. I remember being hot (the band of my sunhat was close-fitting and my shoes felt tight), the smell of the grass, the pollen from the buttercups and being slightly sniffly, itchy-eyed from it. There are many photographs from a picnic like that one and I cannot be sure if the images support my memory of if my memory is made from those photographs.

In his book about memory, *Why Life Speeds Up As You Get Older*, Dr Douwe Draaisma, describes an incident in the childhood of the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget.

Piaget had clear memory of a near kidnap when he was an infant in which his nursemaid beat off the kidnapper and received a material reward.

Many years later she converted to Christianity and her conscience would not allow her to keep the prize so she returned it with the confession that the episode had been invented. Yet Piaget had a clear memory of the incident, including the lesions on the nurse's face.

As I look at those photographs from my childhood I little recognise the child that physically resembled me; there is a discrepancy between what I remember and the child in the pictures. That gap between the image and the experience and the memory is universal. The exhibition catalogue for the Barbican show *Who's Looking at the Family?* written by Val Williams, includes the family album images of June and Hilda Thompson as children and describes that gap as propaganda. Years later, the women had murdered their father who had cruelly and systematically abused them.

"Tommy Thompson's photographs of his severely damaged children acted as propaganda, both within and outside the family, and positioned him as a seemingly loving storyteller who dealt, persuasively, in idylls." (1994, 30)

The damage enacted on the little girls is unseen in the images; they appear together with smiling faces.

The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu describes the family photograph in similar terms:

*"Because the family photograph is a ritual of the domestic cult in which the family is both subject and object, because it expresses the celebratory sense which the family group gives to itself, and which it reinforces by giving it expression, the need for the photographs and the need to take photographs (the internalization of the social function of this practice) are felt all the more intensely the more integrated the group and the more the group is captured at the moment of its highest integration."* (1990, 30)

I needed to remake those images and express those different elements: The fiction of my memory, the party line of the family and the bridge between past and present and include the old self still contained within me now.

Initially, I worked with artefact and memory. I was intrigued not just by the images but by what appeared within them. One photograph shows my first writing lesson with my great aunt. I struggled hard to write the letter "E", adding too many horizontal strokes, getting it wrong, and my sister, with helpful energy, looks on. We were working at a small, round, wooden table that belonged to my mother's mother and is now in my family's home. That image and table provided the link between the past and the present. By re-photographing the table and fusing the images together, table now with image of then, I could make a new photograph that expressed the past in the present. As I worked on the Memory series of images, they became less attached to specific instances and artefacts and more concerned with general memory: the ghost of the child that was me and her fantasy

and aspiration projected into the present and expressed in terms of the past. However, these pictures still did not articulate the sense of bereavement that followed my childhood or the discrepancy between how I remember me and the child that was I in the images. I needed to re-introduce myself, to obscure myself then with me now.

I collected clothes from charity shops and watched the weather for the right conditions; I had to check lighting and shadow direction. Working variously with my own children as the photographer we shot the images again and again until the light resembled the original and shape I was throwing matched or fitted the original. Finally, when constructed, the images were saying what I wanted: with myself as the bridge between the past and the present, obscuring my child self, a deadpan Lilliputian anomaly, out of time and out of place, a jolt and a jar to the vernacular.

In his wide-ranging analysis of child photography Chris Townsend says:

*Childhood is an imaginary place colonised exclusively by adults. Children - aware of their different status, but not knowing what that status is - do not live there. They are always somewhere else - gone...into imaginary spaces that we, as adults, cannot enter. To compensate for the child's absence, adults substitute representations: photographs, films, stories. Childhood becomes a screen for our own projections - both present: what and who we imagine "our" child is, what they are doing, thinking, now and past: what and who we believe we were and cannot properly remember. Media exist that "fix"*

*those projections: still photographs, the flickering, stained and damaged reels from sixties' cine-cameras, the hyper-real and still false footage of the nineties camcorder. We need the image, and we need the fix, the fiction of fact, as a guarantee for our stories.* (Townsend, 1998 p13-14)

When my own children were small I was resistant to making images of them: friends would say how strange they found it, with comments like "I'd love to be able to make great images of my child, why don't you?" On analysis my stance was childish: an infantile stubbornness that now my children have grown has benefited no one. I believe now that my reservations were based on my unease about being photographed: the obstinate photographer was really the wilful articulation of a younger self and the images of my childhood are much more to do with the fiction woven around my parents' lives than a description of mine.

The neurologist Dr Oliver Sacks describes a life as narrative, "*It might be said that each of us constructs and lives a 'narrative,' and that this narrative is us, our identities...for each of us is a biography, a story.*" (Sacks, 1985, 105) And the American scholar, Paul John Eakin, articulates further, "*The self that is the center of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure*" (Eakin, 1985, 3). The family photograph is a manifestation of that invention.

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Mandy (1952), d Mackendrick A; p Norman L; sc Whittingham J and Balchin N; cast: Jack Hawkins (Richard Searle), Terence Morgan (Harry Garland), Phyllis Calvert (Christine Garland), Mandy Miller (Mandy Garland); US title: *Crash of Silence*

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Williams V (1994), *Who's Looking At the Family*. London: Barbican Art Gallery



Memory Series #1  
(family portrait including  
self with broken china Peter  
Rabbit, appropriated image,  
digital photograph) copyright  
Elizabeth Orcutt 2005



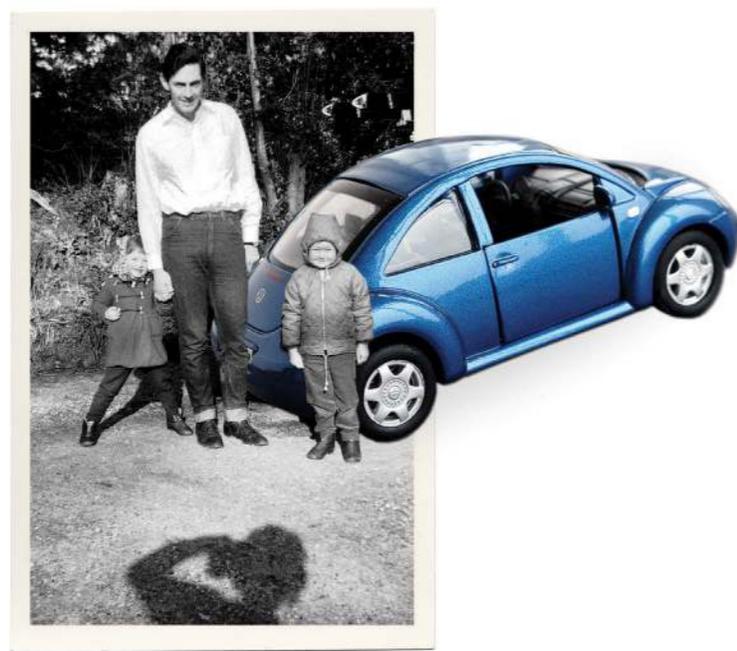
Memory Series #2  
(family portrait including self  
with Nativity crib donkey,  
appropriated image, digital  
photograph) copyright  
Elizabeth Orcutt 2005



Memory Series #3  
(self-portrait with paper  
crown, appropriated image,  
digital photograph) copyright  
Elizabeth Orcutt 2005



Memory Series #5  
(family portrait including self  
with doll, appropriated image,  
digital photograph) copyright  
Elizabeth Orcutt 2005



Memory Series #6  
(self-portrait with toy VW  
Beetle, appropriated image,  
digital photograph) copyright  
Elizabeth Orcutt 2005



Memory Series #8  
(self-portrait with mechanical  
toy toad, appropriated image,  
digital photograph) copyright  
Elizabeth Orcutt 2005



Memory Series #9  
(self-portrait with roses,  
appropriated image, digital  
photograph) copyright  
Elizabeth Orcutt 2005



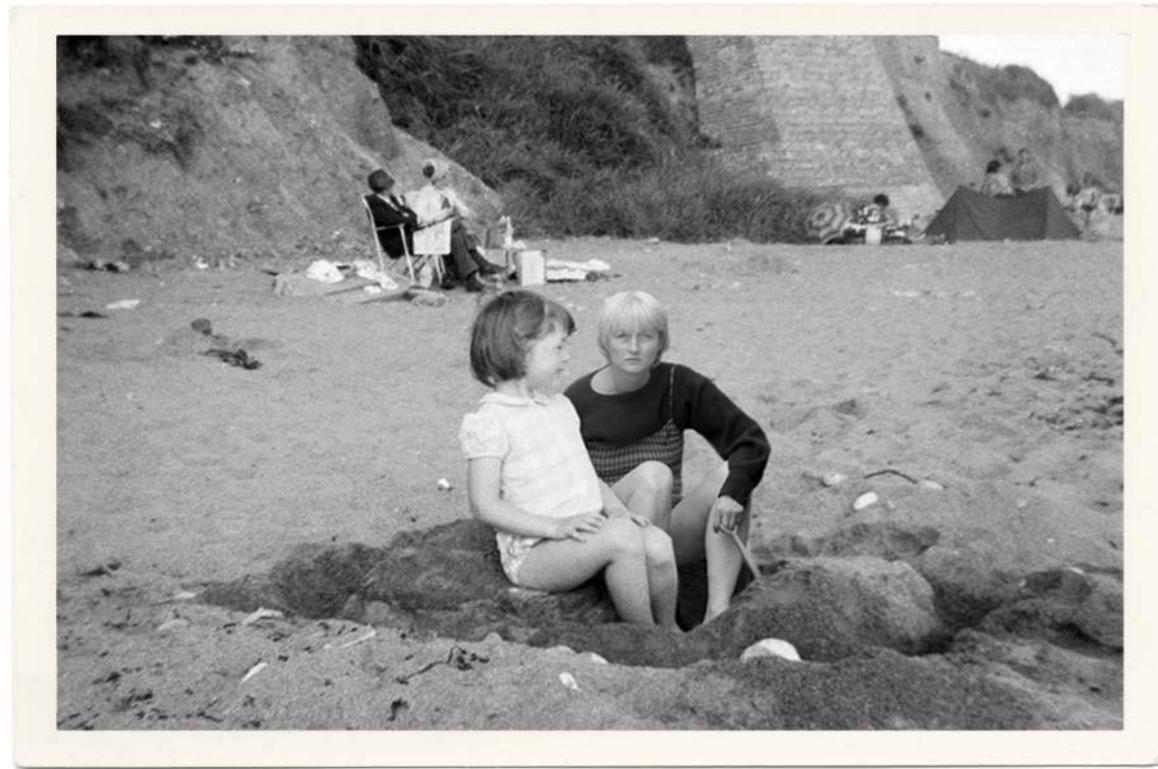
Memory Series #10  
(self-portrait with feather fan,  
appropriated image, digital  
photograph) copyright  
Elizabeth Orcutt 2005



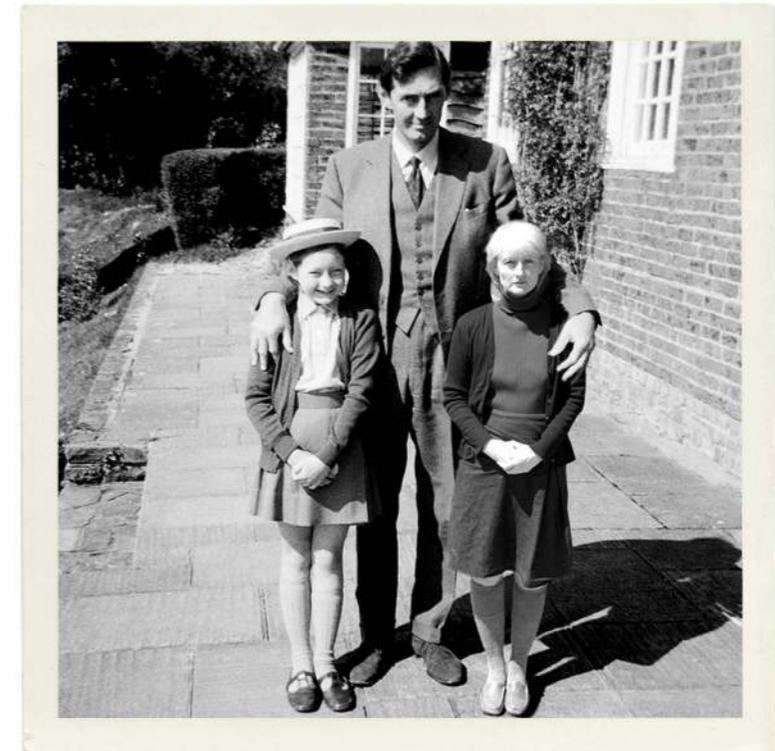
Memory Series #11  
(self-portrait with carrier bag,  
appropriated image, digital  
photograph) copyright  
Elizabeth Orcutt 2005



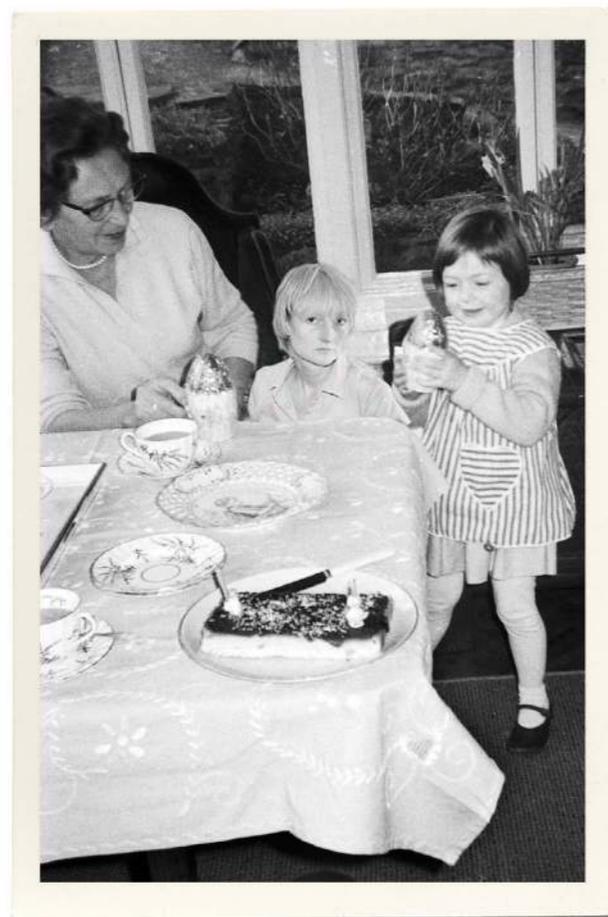
Memory Series #12  
(family portrait including  
self with table and books,  
appropriated image, digital  
photograph) copyright  
Elizabeth Orcutt 2005



Family Series #1  
(family portrait including self  
at the seaside, appropriated  
image, digital montage) copy-  
right Elizabeth Orcutt 2005



Family Series #2  
(family portrait including self  
with father, appropriated  
image, digital montage) copy-  
right Elizabeth Orcutt 2005



Family Series #3  
(family portrait including self  
with Easter eggs, appropri-  
ated image, digital montage)  
copyright Elizabeth Orcutt  
2005



Family Series #5  
(family portrait including self  
on a picnic, appropriated  
image, digital montage) copy-  
right Elizabeth Orcutt 2005



Family Series #6  
(family portrait including self  
and mother, appropriated  
image, digital montage) copy-  
right Elizabeth Orcutt 2005



Family Series #8  
(family portrait, including self,  
with umbrella, appropriated  
image, digital montage) copy-  
right Elizabeth Orcutt 2005



Family Series #9  
(family portrait, including self,  
skiing, appropriated image,  
digital montage) copyright  
Elizabeth Orcutt 2005



Twins Series #1  
(double self-portrait at gym-  
khana, appropriated image,  
digital montage) copyright  
Elizabeth Orcutt 2010



Twins Series #2  
(double self-portrait as  
dancer, appropriated image,  
digital montage) copyright  
Elizabeth Orcutt 2010



Family Series #3  
(double self-portrait giving  
piggyback, appropriated  
image, digital montage) copy-  
right Elizabeth Orcutt 2010



Twins Series #4  
(double self-portrait seated,  
appropriated image, digital  
montage) copyright Elizabeth  
Orcutt 2010



Twins Series #5  
(double self-portrait in  
garden, appropriated image,  
digital montage) copyright  
Elizabeth Orcutt 2010

**Elizabeth Orcutt** (\*1963, UK)

Elizabeth is an academic artist working with lens-based media from 2004. She is currently working towards PhD at Falmouth University (UK), with the provisional title of Photography and Reflection: Images of My Self. Between 2007 and 2014 she worked as deputy picture editor at The Times newspaper in London. She worked in features journalism prior to this for many years.

**Study**

**Current** PhD (photography by practice) awarding institution University of the Arts London

**2006** PGCE (PCET) Plymouth University

**2005** MA Photography (with distinction) University College Falmouth

**Exhibitions**

**2015** Portraits (group show), The Center for Fine Art Photography, Fort Collins, Texas, USA

**2014** SALON/14 (group show), Photofusion, London, UK

Miami Photo Salon, Florida, USA

**2013** Self-portrait (group show), PhotoPlace Gallery, Middlebury, Vermont, USA

**2012** Blanca Berlin Gallery (Madrid) at Affordable Art Fair (Battersea), London, USA

**2010** Piers Bourke Gallery (group show), London, UK

**2009** Port Eliot Festival (The Cocktail Bar), Cornwall, UK

**2008** The Salt Gallery, Hale, Cornwall, UK

Euroclear (Sao Paulo), Brazil

**2007** Euroclear (Frankfurt), Germany

13 (group show) Dray Walk Gallery, London, UK

Euroclear (London), UK

Euroclear (Brussels), Belgium

**2006** The Salt Gallery, Hale, Cornwall, UK

Put Away These Childish Things (group show), Focalpoint Gallery PCAD, Plymouth, UK

**2005** HyperMArt (group show), University College Falmouth, Cornwall, UK

Intervision (group show), Dray Walk Gallery, Truman Brewery, London, UK

Still Stories (group show), Falmouth Arts Centre, Cornwall, UK

**2004** Daily Telegraph 'Visions of Science' (touring group show), UK

**2003** The Independent 'Save It' (group show), The Science Museum, London, UK

**2001** Royal Brompton Hospital, London, UK

**Collections**

Ernst and Young curated by Anderson O'Day

Euroclear (Brussels), Belgium

**Competitions**

**2011** 7th Julia Margaret Cameron Award - Self Portrait Category runner up, Portrait Salon

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