PUNCTURING THE SILENCE

Painting Over the Found Photograph

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ABSTRACT
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PUNCTURING THE SILENCE: Painting Over the Found Photograph

Set up as a visual investigation, the research explores how the addition of paint and graphite materials onto the surface of found and discarded photographs, creates a visual and conceptual disjuncture by punctuating and altering the temporal frame of the photograph. The research is positioned in relation to Susan Sontag’s description in On Photography (1977) as to how the photograph can at once “transfix” and “anesthetize” the subject matter, which through the passage of time serves to create an “aesthetic distance,” and Roland Barthes’ observation in Camera Lucida (1980) that the photograph is “platitudinous.” The tendency to project nostalgic sentiment onto the found vernacular photograph is explored, drawing on Susan Stewart’s notion of the authentic object in On Longing (1984), which, it is argued, when expressed in the form of the found photographic object, becomes an emblem of loss, further exaggerating the sense of distance and impenetrability.

Working specifically with the found photograph prompts a questioning of previous critical commentaries concerning painting over photographs, as in Gerhard Richter’s ‘Overpaintings,’ where Joannes Meinhardt (2009) suggests that the addition of paint intensifies the essential “speechlessness” of the photograph. This research extends these discourses and contributes a counter critical position, supported and articulated through an original body of work. It proposes that the applied paint on the surface of the found photograph punctures the essential “speechlessness” and unknowability magnified within this subset of photography. The very physical materiality and difference offered by the paint medium ruptures the perception of distance and mediates the tendency towards nostalgic interpretations, bringing a level of stability and certainty in the face of the uncertain, fluctuating meaning and temporal plane of the found photograph.
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Author’s Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Graduate Committee.

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The visual body of work produced as part of this thesis will be presented in the form of an exhibition at Plymouth University.

Signed:

Date: 11th July 2014
The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness. Although the two are identical twins, man, as a rule, views the prenatal abyss with more calm than the one he is heading for (at some forty-five hundred heartbeats an hour). I know, however, of a young chronophobiac who experienced something like panic when looking for the first time at homemade movies that had been taken a few weeks before his birth. He saw a world that was practically unchanged—the same house, the same people—and then realized that he did not exist there at all and that nobody mourned his absence. He caught a glimpse of his mother waving from an upstairs window, and that unfamiliar gesture disturbed him, as if it were some mysterious farewell. But what particularly frightened him was the sight of a brand-new baby carriage standing there on the porch, with the smug, encroaching air of a coffin; even that was empty, as if, in the reverse course of events, his very bones had disintegrated.

PART ONE
1. INTRODUCTION

Set up as a visual investigation, the research aims to explore how the addition of paint and graphite materials onto the surface of found and discarded photographs, might create a visual and conceptual disjuncture by punctuating and altering the temporal frame of the photograph. Taking as a starting point Susan Sontag’s description in On Photography (1977) as to how the photograph can at once “transfix” and “anesthetize” the subject matter, which through the passage of time serves to create an “aesthetic distance” and Roland Barthes’ observation in Camera Lucida (1980) that the photograph is “platitudinous”:

I cannot penetrate, cannot reach into the Photograph. I can only sweep it with my glance, like a smooth surface. The Photograph is flat, platitudinous in the true sense of the word.\(^3\)

The term “platitudinous”*, French in origin, literally means flatness. Used in an English context the term has more prosaic connotations, suggestive of “a trite, dull, or obvious remark or statement; a commonplace” or a “staleness or insipidity of thought or language; triteness”.\(^4\) In referring to the impenetrability of the photograph Barthes considers how he is always an outsider to its content, “the essence of the image is to be altogether outside, without intimacy,” whilst recognising at the same time that it is this position of distance—“unrevealed yet manifest, having that absence-as-presence which constitutes the lure and fascination of the Sirens.”\(^5\)

Through the research I argue that the impenetrable and anaesthetizing qualities implicit within the photograph as presented by Sontag and Barthes, are particularly exaggerated and magnified when viewing the found vernacular photograph, serving to further extend the conceptual gap and distance between the viewer and photographic subject. The application and introduction of paint onto the photographic surface, is an attempt to lessen and ameliorate the perceived conceptual and temporal gap, presented by the unknowable orphaned photograph. The paint provides a physical and

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conceptual abrasion, shattering and punctuating the photographic silence and the
tendency towards nostalgia when viewing this subset of photography.

The resulting visual conflict and disjuncture caused by the clash between
photograph and paint is not only graphically and visually disruptive but the additional
marks permanently alter and transform the amorphous meaning of the found
photograph—fixing it to a new author and implying an ulterior motive—more solid in
its meaning than the uncertain conjecture and supposition projected onto the unknown
found photograph. The very physical materiality and difference offered by the paint
medium ruptures the perception of distance and mediates the tendency towards
nostalgic interpretations. Offering a definable solid that reveals and makes explicit my
intention and direction in the traceable brush marks—whilst at the same time fixing
down the photographic temporal fluctuations and dizzying effects of time as described
by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (explained in more detail in Part Three 3.1
From Past to Present).

The following body of text is divided into three sections. Section one provides
an outline of the key research focus, recognising that my methodological approach of
testing ideas and theory through practice, provides new insight into the current
understanding of the relationship between painting and photography. Section two
situates my research in a photographic context, drawing on Sontag’s and Barthes’
definitions of the photograph and examining these against the particular photographic
qualities unique to the found or “orphaned” photograph. The research tests these
theoretical concepts and observations through the studio practice, documenting the
accumulative process of looking and noting how visual familiarity over a sustained
period of time, supported by the construction of narrative and supposition, converge
to build a deep attachment to otherwise unknown photographic subjects. This insight
into the private sphere of the studio and the formation of relationships with visual
imagery, in this case the found photograph, reveals the ambiguity and complexity of
such relationships, which in turn presents a different position that questions previous
understandings of the relationship between paint and photograph.

The research is located within a historical and contemporaneous context,
connected to writers and artists who are concerned with understanding the
relationship between photograph and painted mark (explored in Part Three). The
research questions why the photograph, more than any other form of visual
representation, has become so deeply tied to a sense of self, assuming the mantle or
position—perhaps not dissimilar to that of a sacred object—where external interferences that punctuate the photographic surface (in my work painted marks) are seen as disruptive and disturbing. In positioning this argument I draw on the writings of Marina Warner in *Phantasmogoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-first Century* (2006) who links photography with long-standing mythologies and superstitions about identity and the reflected self. Whilst Barthes’ motivation for writing *Camera Lucida*, “to learn at all costs what Photography was ‘in itself,’” is predicated on the recognition that photography is different from all other forms of graphic representation. Barthes reminds us of the underlying “oddness” of seeing ourselves reflected “on a piece of paper,” despite photography having been absorbed and normalised into an everyday activity. In *The Originality of the Avant-Garde* (1986) the cultural historian Rosalind Krauss states that photographs are “distinct from painting or sculpture or drawing. On the family tree of images it is closer to palm prints, death masks, the Shroud of Turin… a kind of deposit of the real itself,” referring to C. S. Pierce’s description of the index to distinguish photography from other graphic media, “for technically and semiotically speaking, drawing and painting are icons, while photographs are indexes.” The differences between the medium of photography and paint media are explored at length throughout Part Two and Three, referring to Barthes’ distinction that the photograph pertains a “special status… it is a message without a code” compared to other “imitative” forms, a separation similar to Krauss’ distinction between icons and indexes.

In examining the implications of Sontag’s description of “aesthetic distance” through the practice, the research explores the effect of time on the historic photographic object, as viewed from the present, drawing on Susan Stewart’s description of the “lost object” and the futile search for the authentic souvenir in *On Longing* (1984). Similarly in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989) Julia Kristeva describes how a profound sense of separation from the lost object induces feelings of melancholia. The research argues that the found photograph becomes a representation of loss. The desire to know and connect with the photographic subject, as observed through my visual study and accompanying writing, is represented by the use of paint in an attempt to penetrate and reach under the photographic skin.* In

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* Through the documentation process I am able to record the complexity of feelings felt towards the found photograph and note that I use terms such as “desire”, “attraction” and “repulsion”, alongside observing darker compulsions such as “violence”, “anger” and
undertaking this action I recognize the ultimate irony and impossibility of bridging the perceived gap (nothing can awaken or penetrate the photographic silence), with paint ultimately destroying the very object I am attracted to. The research however presents that the resultant intervention is transformative, rupturing the perception of time and permanently altering meaning within the photograph. In the face of the platitudinous surface and permanent quietude of the photograph the paint becomes a destabilizing intrusion. This interventionist approach links back to Andre Breton’s original definition of black humour as outlined in his *Anthology of Black Humour* (1940), where he uses shock tactics to subvert the norm, forcing the viewer to acknowledge and confront the very thing that causes pain. The curator Ralph Rugoff argues that this tactic of “defamiliarisation” is utilised by artists such as Gerhard Richter, Andy Warhol and more recently in the paintings by Luc Tuymans and Marcel Dumas, who by mixing up the codes of painting and photography “undo the formal categories and definitions through which we make sense of the world around us.”13 In this section I argue that the application of paint within my practice is utilised as a form of black humour whilst also being *kathartic* in intent, as applied in an Aristotelian sense of tragedy. In this instance the jarring opposition and bluntness of the paint, confronts the perceived separation and distance effected by the photographic object, lessening the cloying nostalgia and maudlin preoccupations.

In Part Three I analyse the relationship between paint and photograph when brought together on the same visual surface. Taking Barthes’ description of the “punctum” and examining how paint lying on the photographic surface operates in a similar way to create a “blind field,” whereby the “sweeping glance” is arrested and focussed by the additional “punctum.”14 I acknowledge how meaning as applied to the photograph is slippery and uncertain, referring to the art historian Geoffrey Batchen’s

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13 The spelling and term “katharsis” refers to the Aristotelian sense of tragedy as explored in Part Two, 2.7 Black Humour.
suggestion that in the original French edition Barthes referred to “punctum” as a “supplement,” further extending the notion that meaning is not implicit in the photograph rather it is directed by the viewer.\textsuperscript{15} Faced with the unknowable found photograph, this uncertainty becomes manifest, relying almost entirely on supposition and the supplementary to apply meaning to the lost photographic object, as evidenced by my accompanying visual practice.

The research suggests that the pre-digital original photographic object has been proffered a special status not dissimilar to Walter Benjamin’s definition of “aura” as applied to an art object in \textit{The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction}\textsuperscript{(1935)}. I argue that the notion of the original authentic object becomes further exaggerated when viewing a found photograph. Whilst the orphaned photograph appears to connect us to a lost past, simultaneously authenticating it through its evidential qualities, this authenticity is further compounded by the photograph having an actual physical and tangible presence. The photographic object provides the photograph with a distinct quality that marks it as different, belonging to another time, in comparison to the vast fleeting and instantaneous photographic imagery presented through the digital sphere.

Referring to the artist Tacita Dean’s collection of reproduced found photographs printed in her limited edition bookwork \textit{Floh} (2005), Mark Godfrey describes the found photograph as a “relic.”\textsuperscript{16} A term that describes how the original photographic object changes through time, becoming a “relic” of the past and providing an indexical link back to a real lived experience. This section examines artists who disturb and challenge the reverence accorded to the original art object in relation to Benjamin’s observations, looking in particular at the artists Jake and Dinos Chapman, who paint onto historically important artworks with an established value, including rare prints of \textit{The Disaster’s of War} by José de Goya y Lucientes. These painterly interventions by the Chapman Brothers knowingly challenge and magnify the adoration of the artist’s mark and art object whilst at the same time reinforcing Walter Benjamin’s notion of “aura.” In comparison to the rarified art object the found photograph is commonplace with little monetary value. Yet despite this has attained a particular status reinforced by a set of ritualistic behaviours not dissimilar to Benjamin’s description of the cultish adoration foisted upon the art object.
The notion of the photograph as being “platitudinous” and distant, particularly when applied to the found photograph is examined alongside artists who mix-up painterly and photographic codes to blur and question the delineation between paint and photography, focusing in particular on artists who, through paint, question a photographic way of seeing. This includes comparing the work of contemporary painters Theo Cuff and Johannes Kahrs, who use paint to replicate and distort familiar photographic motifs such as the blur, close cropping and casual photographic subject matter, alongside the work of Dryden Goodwin, Susan Hiller and Gerhard Richter who in very different ways graphically mark over the photograph, to question the different “realities” presented by the graphic mark and photograph.

At the beginning of this research there were relatively few examples of artists who worked specifically with the found photograph, in particular marking and disrupting the surface through autographic means. The research recognises the development and expansion of this form of practice over the last ten years, as seen, for example, in the work of Joachim Schmid and Anzeri Maurizo, who in different ways rework the found photograph through a process of fracturing and decoration. This type of intervention has arguably become popular as the digital sphere becomes the predominant way of communicating photographic imagery, which in turn marks out the photographic object or “relic” in the form of the lost photograph, as distinctive and separate from our current time frame. This body of research contextualises what can be defined as a new field within photography—decorating and disrupting the found photograph—by exploring the role of nostalgia and sentiment evoked by the found photograph, and arguing that as a “relic” this subset of photography becomes a personification of loss and distance.

Framed specifically around the found photograph my research examines the ontological differences between paint and photograph as they are brought together on the same visual surface, exploring the physical otherness and the “presentness” of the paint against the surface flatness and the temporal fluctuations of “time passing and to come”17 as expressed within the found photograph. Working specifically with the found photograph over a long period of time within the studio prompts a questioning of previous critical commentaries concerning Gerhard Richter’s “Overpaintings.” The writer Johannes Meinhardt suggests that the addition of paint intensifies the essential “speechlessness” of the photograph.18 This research extends these discourses and contributes a counter position, observed through the studio practice, presenting the
argument that the found photograph as a form personifies the unknown. In the face of this exaggerated sense of uncertainty the paint fixes the temporal fluctuations of the photograph and brings to it a level of stability and certainty. This distinct positioning is explored and articulated through an original body of work, as part of the accompanying exhibition showcasing a series of painted over photographs, documented in further detail in Appendix 2., and includes examples from: The Polaroid series, Portraits, Found Postcards, Baby photographs, Passport photographs and a series of artist bookwork’s: Some Children and Some People III, IV.

1.1. METHODOLOGY
This body of work has been developed from a long-standing preoccupation with marking over the photograph with graphic media. The research was initially set up to illustrate and explore the artist and critic Martha Rosler’s claim in Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings (2004) that inherent to the photograph is a tendency towards the “illusionistic.” Rosler’s central argument suggested that the photograph only represents the surface of reality rather than the underlying social and material forces affecting the photographic subject. Rosler argued that by comparison the interventionist methods deployed by the German Dadaists, in particular the fractured photomontages by John Heartfield (1891-1968), were able to present a more truthful account of reality. Rosler drew on Walter Benjamin’s reference to the twentieth century playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) who in early 1930’s Germany observed, “A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG says next to nothing about these institutions.” Using these arguments as a theoretical framework into which I situated my practice, the application of autographic marks to a photographic image were intended to expose and make explicit my intentions as the photographer. This process of inscribing and marking over the photographic surface was to make visible the social and physical construction of photographs.

In the very early stages of my research I produced two bodies of visual work: Mrs May’s Pigeons (2005) and Dan’s Fast Cars (2005). Both works could be broadly situated as belonging to a documentary genre, with Mrs May’s Pigeons consisting of a series of large format photographs recording the interior of a pigeon loft, featuring textual writings, notations and scribbles over the photographic surface. These notations, some legible, some not, reflected the content of a series of interviews with Mrs May the loft owner, as well as my own experience of being in the fetid
environment of a pigeon loft. Similarly *Dan’s Fast Cars* documented, through a series of vivid colour photographs, my experience of attending, across one summer, a number of stock car races. These images were then collated and reproduced into a book format, onto which I painted various textual and non-textual commentaries over the pages and cover, which referred to dialogues and happenings at the actual events. Both bodies of work broadly explored notions of subjectivity within documentary photography and asserted the use of graphic drawn marks to reveal and make explicit my role and observations as the author.

My practice can be sited against a lineage of historic and contemporary artists who use methods of graphic disruption to question photographic ways of seeing, including: Dadaist photomontage artists such as John Heartfield and Hannah Höch; the mixed media paintings of Andy Warhol and Gerhard Richter; the hyper realistic paintings of Franz Gertsch and more recently Tacita Dean’s painted over photographs *Painted Kotzch Trees* (2008) and Dryden Goodwin’s intricately scratched photographs *Cradle* (2002). Despite this positioning, and supported by theoretical arguments to explain the motive and compulsion for drawing over photographs, the persistent response to the resultant exhibition (Phoenix Arts Centre, Exeter, 2005) was one of questioning why I marked over the photographs. The prevailing assumption being that marking the photograph is not expected, even when viewed by a cultural, gallery–attending audience. Where I saw the graphic marks as adding and extending the photographic message, literally embedding conversations I had whilst taking the photographs into the photographic surface, many viewers saw the addition of graphic marks as disturbing.

This proved to be a turning point in my practice, when I began to consider that the underlying motive to mark the photograph was not simply about wanting to expose the ideological constructed nature of photographs, rather I recognised that the impulse was more deep-seated, symbolising a personal dichotomy—an attraction and frustration—towards the photograph itself. Responding to this change in direction, I began to consider the reason for both my long-standing attraction to photographs, which was then represented by a growing collection of found vernacular photographs collected over several years, and the accompanying, inevitable, sense of frustration at what I perceived to be the limitations of photography. This internal dissonance was particularly strong when viewing my collection of found photographs, resulting in a
A deliberate decision to work with this genre of photography, often described as “vernacular” or domestic* and not usually viewed as an art form.

These types of photographs detached from their origins are classified as lost. They are at once ubiquitous with little monetary value, commonly found in junk shops and second hand stalls, and as represented in my collection, bought mostly from online dealers. The method of collecting photographs is arbitrary, selected either by viewing and handling the physical photograph or selecting photographs from thousands of others online. This process relies on either an instantaneous connection with the photographic subject, or a more subdued interest in what is deemed as ordinary, unstartling, everyday vernacular subject matter. Whilst the method of collecting is casual, the decision to paint over the photograph is more serious, requiring time. This is the time it takes for the photograph to become familiar, moving from being a distant object of fascination, to building a relationship with each photograph, either through the construction of a fitting narrative or becoming visually familiar, as documented within this research.

Key to the findings and the original contribution of knowledge as presented within this body of research is the methodological approach underpinning my practice and study. The research takes as a starting point Barthes’ and Sontag’s observations that implicit to the photograph is a sense of distance and impenetrability. These statements and supporting theoretical concepts are then examined and tested through the practice with a very particular subset of photography—the found photograph. The practice involves long periods of looking at the photograph, both on a formal level of observing the relationship between paint and the photographic subject and also examining my own ambivalent feelings towards the photographic subject. This process reveals the complex relationship between looking and the imagination, noting

* My collection of found photographs initially grew in parallel to collecting old family photographs. This included being sent old family photographs where meaning and familial identity had become lost (Anonymous Edwardian Man, Photograph 33.), whilst bringing together photographs where personal attachments still remained strong (Photograph 2.). The research was originally framed to compare how my painted responses differed in light of familial and unknown photographs. However as my collection grew the emphasis moved to exploring my fascination with the unknowable found photograph and how this genre seemed to exemplify and exaggerate the contradictory relationship we have towards the photograph. In particular the focus concerned itself with photographic distance implicit in viewing old photographs as described by Sontag and Barthes. Within the final body of work a few personal photographs are included amongst the found photographs, including myself as a child in the Some People book works. They have been selected because the photograph represents a distance and a detachment.
how supposition and narrative interject and fill in the silence and gaps presented by
the unknown photograph. Unlike the presentation of a theoretical framework, into
which arguments can be distilled and hemmed in to provide a defined and definitive
picture, the conjunction of studio practice used to test and observe theory as applied to
photography and painting, reveals an altogether messier perspective. The formation of
attachments towards each photograph in my collection is ridden through with
ambiguities and contradictions. Meaning constantly slips until I can no longer be sure
of my own motive or positioning. By embracing the instability and paradoxes made
explicit through the practice, the research questions previous understandings and
presents a different perspective on the tensile and fraught relationship between
painting and the photograph.

By focusing on the genre of found photographs the research examines why
this subset of photography evokes so strongly feelings of loss and nostalgia. Without
the usual framework or supplementary aural narrative supporting most family
photographs, the found photograph seems to amplify further the “speechlessness” and
unknowable qualities inherent to the photograph. In this way the found photograph
becomes an apt illustration for Sontag’s description of “aesthetic distance.” As the
viewer of these photographs, I am always an outsider to what is being represented;
empathising with Barthes’ observation that no matter how long and intensely he
looked at a photograph “it taught [him] nothing.”

The found photographs are grouped and categorized into series, reflecting
either the photographic form, as in the ‘Polaroid series’ (Appendix 2.) or by subject
such as ‘Baby Photographs’ (Appendix 2.) and The Woman with Big Sunglasses
(Photograph 12 – 16.) This process of ordering and categorisation fosters a familiarity
with the photographic subject, which in turn lessens the feelings of trespass when I
finally come to paint over the photograph. This familiarity does not however absolve
the distance and unknowability of the photograph. In some ways, as I describe
through the research, it doubles the frustration of being so intimate with the
photographic details yet never being able to get any closer to the photographic
subjects. All of the original photographs are digitally scanned with some reprinted as
digital photographs or within book works, allowing for experimentation of scale and
serial formats as in Some People and Some Children (Appendix 2.). The bookworks,
onto which I paint over the pages, seeks to exploit the traditional notion and format of
the photo album. The research documents and provides a rationale for how I treat the original photographs differently compared to their digital counterparts.

Most of the photographs within my collection are representative of European or North American peoples and environments, straddling a time frame from the early twentieth century through to the 1990s. Working within this period most of the photographs are original photographic prints, detached from their original negative or presented as individual Polaroid photographs. Most of the content can be classified as domestic—seemingly innocuous and familiar; ordinary everyday pictures documenting rites of passage; family gatherings, birthdays, marriages and holidays. Despite their ordinariness I see my collection as providing a small window onto the complexity and rich heterogeneity of human life. Sontag notes that the driver behind sentimentalism is either “cynical or humanist” and I acknowledge that my attraction to found photographs leans towards the humanist, with a tendency for romantic and sentimental interpretations.

The visual study includes a documentation of my responses to each of the selected photographs, revealing the ease into which I sentimentalise and form attachments to the unknown photographic subjects as well as cataloguing the inter-relationship between personal association, the imaginary and what is observed. These notes and observations, which trace the initial attraction to the photograph through to the process of painting over the photographic surface, punctuate the thesis at key intervals, with the intention of illuminating and unravelling the key questions underpinning the research. I document both the process of collecting and the formal considerations of applying paint, under the respective headings ‘Collecting photographs’ and ‘Painting over the found photograph’. In the latter, I note the aesthetic decisions and the paint’s relationship with the photograph. However, these formal considerations concerning how I paint over the photograph are adjuncts to the main line of enquiry, with the paint more often used to cover and conceal identity.

The text that accompanies the visual material and which forms part of the written research, mixes a personalized voice and factionary writing. This form of writing accompanied by reflective criticism and academic theory was recognised and given the term “paraliterature” by Rosalind Krauss in her short essay ‘Poststructuralism and the Paraliterary’. Writing in 1980 Krauss saw the new style academic writing as advocated by Barthes (The Pleasure of the Text, 1975; A Lover’s
Discourse, 1977 and Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, 1977)*, as a perceived threat to existing models of North American academic literature. Krauss states that:

Criticism finds itself caught in a dramatic web of many voices, citations, asides, divigations. And what is created… is a kind of paraliterature… The paraliterary space is the space of debate, quotation, partisanship, betrayal, reconciliation; but it is not the space of unity, coherence, or resolution that we think of as constituting the work of literature.  

In the following thesis, the combination of “over painted” photographs, observational writings and the accompanying critical analysis, reveal my own “web of many voices,” (collector, viewer, artist and writer) which have informed this research. It is in this collision of voices—in particular the reflection on the studio practice, which documents the intimate and fraught relationship I have with the found photograph—that a new understanding and insight into the complex relationship between the two mediums is drawn out.

Distinct to my earlier work, this study utilises almost entirely paint media, as the preferred medium to mark over the photograph, in doing so I document how profoundly different the paint is in both physical form and meaning to the found vernacular photograph. These fundamental differences, questioned throughout the research, are made all the more obvious when brought into collision on the same visual plane. The paint as a visceral material in comparison to the neutral and flat surface of the photograph creates a visual and conceptual schism, significantly altering and fixing the temporal fluctuations as exaggerated in the found photograph. The preference for paint in this body of work represents a natural evolution, whereby I moved from crayon to pencil, finally to paint, as I gained confidence in both materials and marking over the photograph. Similar to the reasons for selecting the genre of found photographs to frame my research—to draw out the unease felt when

* The art historian Geoffrey Batchen observes how Barthes’ writing style changed over his life, with his early reflections drawing on “imagery he encountered in everyday life” (1954 – 1956). Several of these essays were later published in Mythologies (1957) followed by further writings including, “The Photographic Message” (1961) and “Rhetoric of the Image” (1964). In his later texts Barthes notably began to explore a “performative style of writing” as seen in The Pleasure of Text (1973), Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes (1975) and A Lover’s Discourse (1977). This style of narrative, which combined autobiographical with philosophical and cultural references, culminates in Camera Lucida, which Batchen describes as “Proustian… posing neither as fiction nor nonfiction but containing elements of both.” (Geoffrey Batchen, “Palinode: An Introduction to Photography Degree Zero”, 12).
marking over non-art photographs associated with the domestic—the paint, as a recognized art medium, represents the polar opposite as a graphic form to the found photograph.

The practice provoked and led the direction of the research, working into a territory that revealed my own level of unease as both the perpetrator and viewer, which in turn forced an analysis as to why painting on unknown photographs stirs up such uncomfortable feelings. In the following thesis the images and supportive observations provide an insight into my conflicting relationship with the photograph, highlighting my attraction to the photograph and resultant frustration of never being able to transcend the photographic void.
PART TWO
2. THE PHOTOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

The research is framed very specifically around a body of work that utilises the found or ‘orphaned’ vernacular photograph, a particular photographic genre that I argue exaggerates and magnifies the unique qualities implicit within the photographic image, as presented by Sontag’s reference to “aesthetic distance” and Barthes’ “platitudinous” surface. Used in the context of this research the term vernacular pertains to the “native or indigenous” similar to its architectural associations representing the "ordinary domestic and functional rather than the essentially monumental.”

The primary location for the vernacular photograph is within the domestic sphere with Colin Harding, curator of Photographic Technology at the National Media Museum, labelling this form of everyday photography as a “snapshot”, which he describes as a:

…naïve’ document, motivated solely by a personal desire to create a photographic record of a person, place, or event and with no artistic pretensions or commercial considerations…

Barthes acknowledges in Camera Lucida that despite photography’s ubiquity and everydayness, there persists a strangeness of seeing “myself as other: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity.”

This section examines the consequences of viewing “myself as other” as seen through the photograph, and argues that despite being commonplace and of little economic value, the photograph and in particular the found vernacular photograph, has become strongly associated with a particular set of functions. The prospect of painting over the original, as evidenced through my own practice, is not easy or straightforward as the author precipitating these actions, and results in equally unsettling feelings for the viewer. Focusing entirely on the vernacular photograph, a genre closely associated with the domestic and personal, the following section takes as a starting point the description “platitudinous” as used by Barthes in Camera Lucida and “anesthetize” and “aesthetic distance” as referenced by Sontag in On Photography. In Camera Lucida Barthes sought to gain an understanding of photography through a set of personal autobiographical reflections, an approach that is often held up as the antithesis of more formal theoretical photographic analysis, where emotional attachments are seen as reflecting social constructs and material relations, as represented by John Tag in The Burden of Representation (1988):
This is not the inflection of a prior (though irretrievable) reality, as Barthes would have us believe, but the production of a new and specific reality, ... The photograph is not a magical ‘emanation’ but a material product of a material apparatus set to work in specific contexts, by specific forces, for more or less defined purpose.\(^{27}\)

The research acknowledges the constructed nature of the photograph as emphasized through the initial connection with Martha Rosler, recognizing in particular the construct and projection of narrative onto the photograph (explored in Part Three 3.3 Paint as Punctum). In an attempt to understand the inter-personal relations and attachments invested in the photograph, the research, through the practice and resultant observations, embraces the prevalent “symptomatology,” a term used by the historian William J. Thomas Mitchell in *What Do Pictures Want?* (2006)\(^{28}\) to explain the persistent tendency of inferring onto the photograph special “magical” qualities, despite counter arguments as represented by Tagg and Rosler which challenge the irrationality of such projections. In understanding why we endow the photograph with these special qualities, the research sets out to illuminate how the vernacular photograph has acquired a particular function and status. In this context marking over the photograph is seen as disruptive, creating an emotional and conceptual discord and upsetting deeply engrained sensibilities of what is normal and expected when viewing the photograph.

In selecting references from Sontag and Barthes through which to set the framework for my investigation, I recognize similarities between both their observations. Sontag uses the term “anesthetize” to describe how the passage of time dilutes and diminishes the message of the photograph, whilst Barthes refers to the photographic subjects as being “anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies,”\(^{29}\) to explain the immobilization of the image concerning the lack of movement and the inability of the subject to “emerge” and be noticed from the “platitudinous” surface. Barthes describes the photograph as representing the “Totality–of–Image…the photographic image is full, crammed: no room, nothing can be added to it.”\(^{30}\) Unlike Barthes’ positive enthrallment to the photograph” where he describes photography’s

\(^{27}\) *Camera Lucida* was published in 1980, shortly before Barthes’ death. It is often criticised for being too subjective compared to his previous academic writings, written in the aftermath of the death of his mother, Henriette Barthes in October 1977. Quoting Graham Allen in his response to Michael Fried in “What Do We Want Photography to be?” (2005), James Elkins reflects that *Camera Lucida* could be describes as “a wholly personal discourse of mourning.”
capabilities of emanating a past reality as, “a magic, not an art,“31 Sontag refuses to glorify the medium, grounding the photograph to a context of both time and place (“aesthetic distance”).∗ Echoing Krauss’ description of the photographic imprint and the associative connection to the real, Sontag writes:

…a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask…32

Skeptical of the mass consumption of images Sontag argues that the proliferation of photographic media results in a desensitization towards the subject. In this context Sontag’s use of “anesthetize” as a term to describe how the photograph numbs the impact through distance, similar to the effect of viewing pornography and “photographed atrocities.” This view is different to Barthes’ use of the term to describe how the photographic subject is neutralised and distilled beneath the platitudinous surface and “Totality” of the photograph. Both Sontag and Barthes are identified as central to my research framework as they recognise in different ways the notion of distance implicit to the photograph, a concept which is examined and questioned within this research through the application of paint onto found photographs.

Photograph 1.

Found Polaroid, 2012 (9cm x 9cm), enamel

*Untitled, from the Polaroid series*

It is the numbers that fascinate. One billion instant photographs made in 1974, leaping to an estimated output of 8.9 billion snapshots produced in the US alone some three years later in 1977. Now nearly forty years on and more than one hundred and seventy years after photography’s inception, the number of photographs have become embedded in the realms of scientific notation, ten to the power of a numeric superscript. The proliferation of photographs and our desire to document every exceptional, ordinary, newsworthy and vacuous experience of what it means to be alive is indicative of our need to pin down and fix Time, an ultimately futile and excessive gesture, whereby the perceived remedy—to take a photograph in order to hold onto Time—perversely ends up further magnifying Time’s incessant flow.

Millions of found photographs lie dormant in bookshops, junk shops, charity shops and now online. Most of these “orphaned” photographs bear no names or reveal information that may assist repatriation to the peoples or families that first bore these photographs. Once loosened from their genealogical ties a photographs’ original meaning soon unravels (not that it was ever static in the first place, even when neatly narrated and fixed into a family photo album).

Perhaps more than any other modern form of visual media, photographic meaning is slippery, malleable and in constant flux. It is not only the meaning of the photograph that is transient however, but also the life of the photographic object itself, which seems destined to wander. Unless belonging to royalty or those representing peoples or events deemed significant, it is with a crushing inevitability that personal photographs, once prized possessions during a lifetime, will become detached, both literally and physically from their original intended meanings and locations.

2.1. THE PHOTOGRAPH: THE SELF AS OTHER, PSYCHOLOGY AND MYTHOLOGY

This section explores the unique qualities of the photograph and questions how, more than any other form of representation, it has become associated with reflecting identity and the self. This includes a study of how long standing mythic beliefs and contemporary scientific understandings of identity, as represented through popular psychology, have become transferred onto the photograph through the use of language. The research questions how the photographs perceived connection to the “real” as described by Barthes’ term “‘That-has-been’… The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent,” links to early mythology and superstition surrounding the ownership of the reflected self. This last point is illustrated by a challenge set by the historian William J. Thomas Mitchell’s provocation in What Do Pictures Want? (2006) where he provokes his students to take a photograph of their mother and cut out the eyes if they “scoff at the idea of a magical relation between a picture and what it represents”.

These arguments point to photography’s special elevated place within visual representation, unique in capturing an individuals “essence” or “being.” In the context of this research voiding someone’s “essence” through painterly obliteration is seen as deeply problematic and unsettling. Barthes observes in Camera Lucida that disposing of the photograph is not easy, reflecting that he is “too superstitious” to throw photographs away, whilst acknowledging at the same time that the only way to “transform the Photograph is into refuse: either the drawer or the wastebasket”. The research reveals how nostalgic sentiment and superstition concerning the self and identity have become readily naturalised when viewing the photograph. The following critique and understanding exposes the limitations of such sentiments, providing a counter and a platform for painterly intervention, a process, which I describe later, as being both kathartic and transformative.

Barthes writes “To see oneself (differently from in a mirror)” is a recent development, and reflects that it is “Odd that no one has thought of the disturbance

* Similar to Sontag’s and Krauss’ recognition that the photograph is linked (as in the Turin Shroud) with a past event, Barthe states: “The realists, of whom I am one and whom I was already one when I asserted that the Photograph was an image without code—even if, obviously, certain codes do inflect our reading of it—the realists do not take the photograph for a ‘copy’ of reality, but for an emanation of past reality: a magic, not an art.” Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida (London: Fontana, 1984), 88.
(to civilization) which this new action causes.”\textsuperscript{35} In considering Photography’s strangeness Barthes reflects:

It is as if we repressed the profound madness of Photography: it reminds us of its mythic heritage only by that faint uneasiness which seizes me when I look at “myself” on a piece of paper.\textsuperscript{36}

Despite this faint “unease” the photograph has become subsumed into normality, becoming “part of the general furniture of the environment—touchstones and confirmations of [a] reductive approach to reality which is considered realistic.”\textsuperscript{37} However as Barthes alludes to, underneath this veil of normalization is a “mythic heritage” reflected through the emotional sentiments and language surrounding the photograph. This naturalisation of the mythic within the everyday is perhaps indicative as to the contradictory relationship we have towards the photograph, where the most explicit and brutal war photographs, as headlined daily within news media, are treated with indifference, whilst others, which perhaps have a more personal attachment, are lauded a special reverence.\textsuperscript{38} Sontag observed how the mass consumption and ubiquity of photographic media, particularly surrounding the regularity of seeing photographic images of war atrocities breeds “a certain familiarity—making it appear familiar, remote (‘it’s only a photograph),” thus distancing ourselves from the reality of the horror.\textsuperscript{39}

Photographs have become a primary tool through which we construct a narrative for our day-to-day lives. Arguably this has become even more so in a digital age of communication where the photograph increasingly becomes an instantaneous validation for lived experience. This research however focuses solely on the analogue vernacular photograph, a form of representation that has become synonymous with nostalgia and sentiment made palpable by, and bound up with, the material and physicality of the actual photographic object (explored in Part Three, 3.4 Disturbing the Original) which described as a “relic” gains the status of an authentic object as opposed to the physical immateriality of the digital photograph.

As recognised by Barthes, photography is a relatively recent technological invention yet the desire to see and understand our reflected selves is embedded within a long history of mythology, superstition and story telling. Many of these beliefs, which sit at odds with post-Enlightenment scientific understandings of the world, continue into the present albeit diluted through language or re-presented in a pseudo-scientific form. In \textit{Phantasmogoria} the writer and cultural historian Marina Warner
investigates the long history and mythology surrounding how we view the reflected self, recognising that the language surrounding photography often reflects a mystical and religious heritage, conjuring up notions of the spirit and soul. Warner argues that however unwittingly, these long-standing beliefs have penetrated and influenced legislation concerning photographic ownership, citing as an example, the nineteenth century jurist and historian Hugo Keyssner who, in 1896, presented the legal argument which argued how photographic reflection was an essential part of the self.

Keyssner first drew an analogy with copyright (a person is the author, and hence owner, of his image), but then changed the argument to a human right: the person’s image is as intrinsic and inalienable part of personhood, and cannot consequently be ‘taken’ without consent. ... Keyssner noticed that photography created a split between the me who is outside the mirror or the image, and the me reflected in it, the first a subject-ego, the second an object-ego, to which the subject lays claim.⁴⁰

Keyssner’s public case was further endorsed by a critic of the time who made the analogous connection with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s 19th Century tragic fictional play Faust, as evidence to declare “For everybody knows that two souls inhabit our chest and that all the time one confronts one’s ego as a subject.”⁴¹

This notion that the photograph is attached and tied to an understanding of our being, an extension of self, which we own, is still evident in the present. Issues of photographic representation and ownership extend—to an entire culture, as in the case of Australian Aborigines who “have successfully obtained copyright on all portraits of Aborigines: these cannot be reproduced without permission of the subject or the subject’s lineal descendants.”⁴² Warner argues that these links between representation and self are long–standing, pre-dating the inception of photography and suggests that the notion of “soul–stealing” as reported by early Western ethnographic photographers to describe how primitive or indigenous people responded upon seeing themselves captured in a photograph, was as much implanted and made manifest by Western visitors, who knew all too readily the notion of “soul–stealing” as told in classical European myths, which as Warner argues, “may explain why the belief was reported so insistently of Others.”⁴³ During the nineteenth century, in response to the continuing medical advancements and understandings made within the field of human anatomy, the belief that “the uniqueness of the person was firmly located elsewhere” other than the flesh and bones⁴⁴ was reflected in the questionable pseudo scientific
practices of physiognomy and phrenology, which utilised portrait photography to illustrate their findings. Warner suggests that:

…the details of someone’s outer physical appearance became more and more invoked in the attempt to capture individual specialness: the you that makes you you. It is as if uniqueness, unable to find a habitation elsewhere in the body, had now fled to the surface: to the face, seat of particular personal identity... 45

Further on she suggests that Walter Benjamin’s essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ (1936), which examines photography’s unique ability for multiple reproduction “does not push back nearly far enough the date of the era’s beginnings”, arguing that the replication of the human face existed long before the photograph, in the form of death masks and waxworks. Reflecting on the dominance of photography today Warner observes how the multiplication of photography is used to further and reinforce the status and uniqueness of a person, suggesting that Benjamin’s essay “does not express [the] law of contemporary celebrity that replication, far from leaching aura from the original, magnifies it so richly that every copy grows numinous by contact with the original.” 46

Connecting the Greek myth of Narcissus to the twentieth century French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan’s “mirror phase”, Warner writes that on discovering his reflection in the pond Narcissus gains an awareness and self-knowledge that is similar to Lacan’s description of the “severance” or separation stage, a key phase within a child’s development when the child begins to “see myself outside myself” 47 as separate and distinct from the mother’s body and the point when the “kernel of self-consciousness” and awareness is formed. 48 Warner elaborates on the relationship between myth and contemporary understanding of the self by suggesting that pre-modern references to the “soul” and notions of the self have been supplanted by the more recent study of psychology, in particular the study of the psyche, which as emphasised by Warner becomes focused on the trend to understand the individuated self: “what is my psyche?” 49

Recognising the all-pervasive influence of Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, Warner, suggests that the twentieth century drive to understand individuality, the unconscious, or “the shadows of the mind” is the modern equivalent to the search for what previously could have been described as the mysteries of the spirit. 50 The Freudian notion that there exists an inner-self, capable of influencing and
over-riding conscious perception perpetuates an idea that we are not fundamentally responsible for our actions, or even thoughts and suggests that within us all there exists basic drivers, which in some way overrides or at least limits true human agency. This psychological abdication of authority for personal actions and motivations has obvious parallels and similarities with the belief, that we embody a soul, an inner being that is God given, which similarly we are unable to determine.

That photography reinforces the notion of the self as unique and individual, which supersedes or replaces a religious belief of having a divine soul, as revealed through language is demonstrated throughout Barthes’ writings in Camera Lucida. Framed around his search to find a photograph of his recently deceased mother, Barthes undertakes an investigation into understanding what a photograph is, and in doing so uses language to describe his search as looking for a photograph that captures the very “essence”, “a being” or “a quality” that is (was) his mother.

[B]ut the Winter Garden Photograph was indeed essential, it achieved for me, utopically, the impossible science of being.51

For what I have lost is not a Figure (the Mother), but a being; and not a being, but a quality (a soul): not the indispensable, but the irreplaceable.52

Photography (this is a noeme) authenticates the existence of a certain being, I want to discover that being in the photograph completely, i.e., in its essence, ‘as into itself…’ beyond simple resemblance, whether legal or hereditary.53

[T]he air is that exorbitant thing which induces from body to soul – animula, little individual soul, good in one person, bad in another.54

All the photographs of my mother which I was looking through were a little like so many masks; at the last, suddenly the mask vanished: there remained a soul, ageless but not timeless, since this air was the person I used to see, consubstantial with her face, each day of her long life.55

Barthes’ fluid interchange between terms such as “soul” and “being” indicates how easily we have subsumed the notion that the photograph is able to represent a person’s inner self and sense of “being”. On finally discovering his mother as a child in The Winter Garden photograph, Barthes states:

[I]t accomplishes the unheard-of identification of reality (“that has been”) with truth (“there-she-is!”); it becomes at once evidential and exclamative; it bears the effigy to that crazy point where affect (love, compassion, grief, enthusiasm, desire) is a guarantee of Being. It then approaches, to all intents, madness.56
This recognition and validation of “Being” and having existed, personified through a photographic reflection that is capable of capturing an “essence” of an individual person, is an important one, and is strengthened further by Warner’s observation that how we come to understand ourselves, as separate conscious beings through seeing the reflected self, is not only embedded deep within our cultural history but now manifests itself in modern psychology.

In her PhD On the Blank Susan Morris (2006) examines the relationship between remembrance and photography, drawing on Lacanian theory to argue the perceived difference between photography and other forms of representation. Morris acknowledges that Barthes was influenced by Lacan’s writings, frequently attending his seminars and “in the opening pages of Camera Lucida [aligning] his reaction to photography as ‘Encounter’ with the Lacanian concept of the Real.”

What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what never could be repeated existentially. In the Photograph, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else: the Photograph always leads to the corpus I need back to the body I see; it is the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency, matte and somehow stupid, the This (this photograph and not Photography), in short, what Lacan calls Tuché, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression.

In Lacanian terms the Real does not pertain to a sense of reality based on external perception, rather it refers to that which “resists representation, what is pre-mirror, pre-imaginary, pre-symbolic – what cannot be symbolized – what loses it’s "reality" once it is symbolized (made conscious) through language.” The Real is authentic, seen as infinite and absolute, representing our early child and the instinctive and natural. Referring to Lacan’s description of the Real, Barthes describes the photograph as being “unclassifiable” that the “photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see.” Providing a fuller explanation and drawing on Rosalind Krauss’ interpretation of the Real in ‘Notes on the Index’ (1986), Morris suggests that photography “bypasses the artificial, culturally produced, representational systems that, for Lacan, are classified under the register of the symbolic” into which sits “language, communication and exchange,” arguing that most forms of drawing and

painting belong to the symbolic category, whereas images of the “Real,” as represented by Photography, are categorised as “unsymbolisable, unrepresentable, unspeakable; it is everything outside the other two Lacanian registers” (the two registers being the imaginary and symbolic). These arguments compound the notion that the photograph is different and distinct to other forms of representation, reflecting back a shadow or “essence” of our fundamental selves that we are unable to articulate through language. In considering photography’s unique properties Barthes reflected how film replicates life “the experience will constantly continue to flow by in the same constitutive style” but the photograph:

...is without future (this is its pathos, its melancholy); in it, no protensity, whereas the cinema is protensive, hence in no way melancholic (what is it, then? – It is, then, simply ‘normal,’ like life). Motionless, the Photograph flows back from presentation to retention.

Perhaps then, in a seemingly secular and individuated society where psychology and the notion of the self has apparently replaced a divine belief system, photographs, with their ability to reflect so powerfully a sense of the individual, arguably become ever more important, continually reflecting and reinforcing a belief in the unique status of the individual.

In Photography Theory (2007), a collection of essays and commentaries responding to the central question: “What is a photograph? What is photography?” the historian Anne McCauley begins by provoking “Why do we care about photographs?” In her introduction she uses the term “common sense” to posit why we link photographs with perceptions of reality, which she recognises “give them a stronger and more troubling psychological presence than other types of pictures.” McCauley focuses on this “troubling” aspect of photography and questions other essayists and critics “general failure to admit the peculiar psychological grip that photographs have on many viewers.”

The awareness of the photograph as psychologically disturbing permeates texts ranging from Barthes’s sense of the punctum or piercing and excising of time to the Surrealists’ reading of Atget’s and found commercial images as uncanny, to say nothing of the fetishistic uses of photographs as substitutes for persons we love or hate. While the confusion of an inanimate image with a living referent occurs in the perception of (and is the justification for) many traditional, handmade objects (portraits that stare, voodoo dolls that are stabbed), that animistic belief is stronger in photography because of the viewer’s knowledge of how the image is made and its closer homology to
It is interesting that a historian who describes herself as being “intrigued by individual objects created at specific moments,” is forced to question why her fellow writers and photographic theorists are predominantly concerned to find a “neat, theoretical framework” into which photography can be contained. In this allusive search for an all-encompassing definition of what photography is, she accuses the contributors of avoiding and acknowledging “their own feelings” when confronting photographs whilst, she points out, conversely overly scrutinising Barthes’ own “very personal responses to diverse types of historical and family photographs”. This positioning reflects the dual aspect and aporia of much photography theory; with one side acknowledging and embracing the contradictory relationship and fallibility of the photograph within their writing (Barthes, Sontag, Krauss) and the other stripping away the emotional conjecture as symptomatic of a sociological construct, which at its most reductive states that:

Photographs are not ideas. They are material items produced by a certain elaborate mode of production and distributed, circulated and consumed within the very relations of their production and sited within a wider ideological complex which must, in turn, be related to the practical and social problems which sustain and shape it.

In a similar vein to Warner and as alluded to by McCauley, in *What Do Pictures Want?* Mitchell argues that the transference of beliefs onto inanimate objects are not the products of a modern society, rather the beliefs that underpin these projections are drawn from a pre-modern need to animate objects. Mitchell acknowledges the writings of both Marx and Freud who attempted to cut through cultural forms of mystification, arguing “that a modern science of the social and the psychological had to deal with the issue of fetishism and animism, the subjectivity of objects, the personhood of things.” However Mitchell suspects that the continuing tendency to animate objects and images such as photographs is “incurable”, a default position of seeing the human form reflected in this way, and that rather than looking at these behaviours as “pathological” or “damaging” we should instead at least recognise their “symptomatology”. Reflecting on the difficulty of defacing personal photographs, Mitchell acknowledges:
Everyone knows that a photograph of their mother is not alive, but they will still be reluctant to deface it or destroy it. No modern, rational, secular person thinks that pictures are to be treated like persons but we always seem to be willing to make exceptions for special cases.33

Mitchell’s observation that the photograph is a “special case” echoes Warner’s and Barthes’ acknowledgement that we bestow onto photography deeply held values that connect to a sense of personhood and being. This connection with self and identity is fundamental, seen to represent what is unsymbolisable and unspeakable and may begin to explain why the introduction of a graphic mark associated with an articulated and directed language onto the surface of the photograph is so unsettling.
Photograph 2.

Black and white photograph, circa 1950.

*My father handed over his entire collection of family photographs in a supermarket bag*

My father handed over his entire collection of family photographs in a supermarket bag, containing frayed yellowed Kodak sleeves, burgeoning at the seams and stuffed full of mis-shaped photographs. Taken and collected at different points of his life the plastic bag offered up photographs of my father as a young child with his now dead family, holiday snaps of my brother and myself as children and my parents wedding photos taken in the late 60s—pre-empting an emotional and revelatory response from my mother who had not seen the photographs of her young wedded self for nigh on forty years.

I saw my Grandfather as a young man, dead over thirty years ago, in black and white, guiding the working shire horses and wearing a battered trilby. Taken in the dog days of the 1940s, on the cusp of a shiny new era of agricultural mechanization, he went on to experience electrification, television and car ownership—though not colour TV, nor a bathroom and the luxury of having a toilet in his house. He did get to see, however, boats hover over water, and air travel become available to the masses, so that as a small child, a family outing to watch aeroplanes land from the viewing terrace at Heathrow airport was as much about aspirations of the possible, gained through hard work and ambition, as only you could hope for in the seemingly more socially mobile times of 1970s England.

I saw my Father for the first time as a young boy, aged five, midway through the century, lined up in the back row of an official school photograph. Staring at the small face now, I see the same shy, coy expression; the frame of face, cheekbones and smile, with all the potential to arrest and charm, carried forward in photographs of my own young son born nearly sixty years later into a new century.
2.2. THE PHOTOGRAPH: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE

The notion that photographs elicit strong psychological attachments because they are associated with a person’s identity and provide a pictorial link to what once happened, divides many writers and photographic theorists. In Photography Theory, David Bate positions Barthes and Sontag within a realist camp in direct opposition to the “anti-realists” which include Umberto Eco, Victor Burgin, Peter Wollen, and John Tagg, whilst Camera Lucida is often criticised for being too romantic and too personalised, marking a significant departure from Barthes earlier texts that are grounded in an academic reading of semiotics and structuralism. In What Photography Is (2011) cultural historian James Elkins metes out his frustration with what he argues as Camera Lucida’s lack of theoretical substance, declaring: “Barthes’s sense of photography is too domestic, too much slanted to the vernacular, the poetic, the subjective, the native, the nostalgic, the anecdotal, the candid.” In writing Camera Lucida however Barthes elected very consciously and publically to reject what he calls “the voice of knowledge, of ‘scientia’”, in favour of a more personalised study, which he argues would provide a more accurate understanding of what “Photography was ‘in itself’”. Barthes describes a sense of “dissatisfaction” at the limits of academic “discourses” such as sociology, semiology and psychoanalysis, in providing an understanding of photography, which he describes as being ultimately “reductive” particularly when concerning familial relationships. Barthes writes:

I had determined on a principle with myself: never to reduce myself-as-subject, confronting certain photographs, to the disincarnated, disaffected socius which science is concerned with. This principle obliged me to ‘forget’ two institutions: the Family, the Mother.

Opting to measure his reactions and responses to a select body of photographs, which Barthes states, “I was sure existed for me” he undertakes to analyse and interpret his own personal responses. In doing so Barthes acknowledges and attempts to apply what “Neitzche called the ‘ego’s ancient sovereignty’ into an heuristic principle” a quote which reflects Neitzche’s writings on the ‘Will To Power’ and the relationship between self-love, self-creation and the drive to succeed. Barthes’ reference to the “heuristic” principle suggests that he believed that it is only through applying an examination of the photograph in relationship to the self that a true understanding of photography can be gained. In this way Barthes recognises the
symbiotic relationship between the photograph, the individual and personal experience. A response that can be diluted by examining and explaining the modes of social and economic production in academic terms, but as argued by Mitchell chooses to perhaps deny and ignore the prevailing and continuing “symptomatology”—symptoms that are representative of persistent and continuing human beliefs and desires. Instead Barthes elects to confront the irrationality surrounding the photograph by placing himself within it, by examining his own subjective attractions and responses and in doing so recognises that the photograph cannot be understood entirely as an abstract construct separate from the personal condition. This method of providing a critique and understanding of photography through a personal reflection and reading is not only attributable to Barthes, the historian Benjamin H. D. Buchloh links together Siegfried Kracauer’s seminal essay “Photography” (1927) with Walter Benjamin’s “Little History of Photography” (1931) and Barthes’ Camera Lucida. Buchloh argues that Kracauer, Benjamin and Barthes attempt to understand photography through both the personal photographic experience and the wider collective expanse of the photographic world:

As though photography’s oscillating ambiguity, as a dubious agent simultaneously enacting and destroying mnemonic experience, could at least be fixed for one moment by situating the image in an analogue to the mnemonic imprint of the family relation itself.79

The research is aligned to writers and artists who attempt to understand and, importantly, acknowledge the relationship between the personal experience of photography and its relationship with a larger collective experience. If, as a genre, the found photograph is persistently seen as a poetic, subjective and a native vehicle, expressing the anecdotal, the candid and evoking nostalgia and sentiment (as explored in the following section), then the persistent continuation of these responses should be recognized and analysed as symptomatic of deep-seated and prevailing human desires. Contrary to Bates’ neat division separating “realists” from “antirealists” both Barthes and Sontag are critical in different ways of the photograph’s limitations, arguing that despite photography’s allusion to reality, the photograph conveys a distance and disconnection that ultimately separates the photograph from reality, as referenced by the term “anesthetized” (Part Three, 3.1 From Past to Present).

In the context of academic study many theorists recognize that the domestic
position of snapshot vernacular photography is anything but benign. In “A Note on Photography and the Simulacral” (1984) Rosalind Krauss questions the limits of domestic photography and how it is used to reinforce certain prejudices about societal norms and behaviours:

The camera is hauled out to document family reunions and vacations or trips. Its place is within the ritualized cult of domesticity, and it is trained on those moments that are sacred within that cult: weddings, christenings, anniversaries, and so forth. The camera is a tool that is treated as though it were merely there passively to document, to record the objective fact of family integration. But it is, of course, more active than that. The photographic record is part of the point of these family gatherings; it is the agent in the collective fantasy of family cohesion, and in that sense the camera is a projective tool, part of the theater that the family constructs to convince itself that it is together that it is whole.80

In her criticism Krauss refers to the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, whose text *Photography: A Middle Brow Art* (1965) is riven through with references to the “common man” and the “bourgeoisie.” These no-longer used terms reveal the issues of that period concerning class structure, social mobility and the elite. Bourdieu argued that photography reflected and reinforced particular class constructs and social relationships:

…in stamping photography with the patent of realism, society does nothing but confirm itself in the tautological certainty that an image of reality that conforms to its own representation of objectivity is truly objective…81

In providing a review of the republication of *A Middle Brow Art* the critic Julian Stallabrass acknowledges that Bourdieu was writing in 1960s France, a country slow to industrialise and where “less than a third of the population owned a television.” However Stallabrass recognizes that even as Bourdieu was writing the social structures were shifting, as seen in “the changing status of children in photography,” which saw them becoming central to family values “reversing the previous hierarchy.”82 Writing over thirty years later Marianne Hirsch presents a less politicised argument than either Krauss or Bourdieu, writing in *The Familial Gaze* (1999):

…the camera has become the family’s primary instrument of self knowledge and self representation, the primary means by which family memory is perpetuated, by which the family’s story is told…83
Whilst the research acknowledges these observations, which provide a framework and sociological critique of vernacular photography, rather than unravelling the social constructs and class distinctions of the found photograph, the study examines the inter-personal relationship and the attachments invested in the everyday photograph, with the resultant application of paint seeking to puncture and destabilise the tendency to sentimentalise the photograph, as discussed in the next section.
Photograph 3.

Found photograph, circa 1960 (9cm x 9cm). At time of writing unworked over.

From the Sailor Series

**Collecting Photographs**

At the bottom of a 1970s biscuit barrel found in a charity shop, I come across a stash of one hundred or more photographs in a brown envelope held together by a fraying elastic band. Most of the photographs are black and white with the occasional bleached out and faded Polaroid. The majority of the photographs depict a group of sailors, bedecked in British Royal Navy uniform, in various states of work and leisure. Looking at these images I can begin to trace a photographic map of the British Navy’s global movements in the mid twentieth century, by tracking the various international harbours, viewed from the ship’s stern as they leave with the Union flag upright in the background, fluttering in what my predilection towards nostalgia (further intensified by looking at these photographs) imagines is always a blue-sky breeze.

I check these locations with my father, prompting a reminiscence of his own seafaring days. We date the photographs as ranging from the 1950s through to the late 1970s. He does not know the men in the photographs but he does recognise faded outlines of ports such as, Singapore, Gibraltar and Plymouth. Gliding from continent to continent and port to port one man reappears in many of the photographs and we surmise that these are his pictures, taken as he posed alongside fellow Matelots. In an early 1950s black and white photograph, Smeaton’s Tower is a dominant signpost in the background, as he sits on the lawns of Plymouth Hoe. In others he is holding what looks like the ship’s cat, obviously taken before the British Navy banned them on hygiene grounds in 1975. In some, where the man is sunbathing on the ships deck, he looks slightly older, surrounded by man/boys who, semi-naked carry a certain youthful, adolescent tautness to their bodies—their languid confidence conveying, to my ahistoric twenty first century eye, just the slightest hint of homoeroticism.
2.3. THE PHOTOGRAPH: TIME AND LOSS

Recognising that the photograph is seen to reflect an “essence” of self and “being,” described by Barthes as having–been or “that-has-been,” I argue that this distinct ability to reflect time passing becomes further pronounced in the found vernacular photograph. In On Photography Susan Sontag recognises how the photograph becomes both “a pseudo-presence and a token of absence,” and in the following sections I argue that the notion of absence and loss as represented by what has passed becomes further heightened when applied to the found photograph.

In proclaiming himself as a realist, Barthes argues that the photograph is a “certificate of presence” containing an “evidential force,” which is undeniably bound up with an intensity of “Time.” Barthes writes that this dual relationship and collision of Time and reality combine to create what he describes as a form of hallucination:

[A] new form of hallucination: false on the level of perception, true on the level of time: a temporal hallucination, so to speak, a modest, shared hallucination (on the one hand “it is not there,” on the other “but it has indeed been”): a mad image, chafed by reality.

There is “always a defeat of Time… that is dead and that is going to die”. In looking at a photograph of two young girls from the same time as his mother he exclaims, “how alive they are! They have their whole lives before them; but also they are dead (today), they are then already dead (yesterday).” He then goes on to explain this dizzying effect of Time within photographs, using as an example, a photograph by August Salzmann of a road near Jerusalem; “three tenses dizzy my consciousness: my present, the time of Jesus, and that of the photographer, all this under the instance of ‘reality.’” This dizzying temporal quality and the ultimate defeat of Time enshrine a sense of loss and absence within the photograph, which for Barthes in Camera Lucida becomes symptomatic of his grief.

In her recent PhD Falling into Photography (2011) Esther Teichmann refers to Barthes’ sense of loss in Camera Lucida, to explain that “inherent to the photographic, as to desire and love, is the paradox and impossibility of grasping a body, the quest to close this gap between oneself and the other, the image, and the inevitable distance which always remains.” Teichmann writes that her concern is not with the photograph as form of evidence or as a copy, rather a sense of “desire” elicited by the photograph, “a perpetual process of becoming, the bodies of desire
never quite imaged or captured, forever eluding the present, always already lost.”

She describes this sense of loss as a “violence, of wanting to possess” and reflects how, when viewing a photograph of her mother as a young child whilst she knows her only as an adult—a mother, she feels a form of “homesickness, a longing for something unnamable, an inherited grief.” It is interesting to note that for Teichmann her sense of loss can only be ameliorated by using active verbs such as wanting to “possess” and “violence,” actions that I discuss in more detail in Part Two.

2.7 Black Humour when discussing the relationship between destruction, creativity and black comedy. The personalized reflective writing accompanying the found photographs in my collection reveal the frustration of never being able to get close to the subject that is represented so vividly within the photograph. Unlike Teichmann however, it does not seem to matter if they are anonymous strangers, the perceived vitality and sense of existence is so evidently communicated through the photograph (see Photograph 12 – 16, *The Woman with Big Sunglasses*) a sense that becomes confused and conflated by a realisation that time has rendered these subjects absent.

Teichmann explores the history of melancholia, drawing on the feminist psychoanalyst writings of Julia Kristeva *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989), to describe melancholia as, “an aborted grieving process, in which separation from the lost object is refused and…in turn incorporated and enshrined.” Representing a view that is not dissimilar to Warner’s references in *Phantasmagoria*, Kristeva draws on the Greek myth of Narcissus to suggest that, “narcissism functions as a defense against the emptiness of separation.” Kristeva describes how “conscious of our being doomed to lose our loves, we grieve perhaps even more when we glimpse in our lover the shadow of our long lost former loved one” a quote that could be interpreted as pertaining to the self and the photographic relationship, where Barthes reflects how “each photograph always contains this imperious sign of [my] future death that each one, however attached it seems to be to the excited world of the living, challenges each of us.”

This moment of recognition, of seeing ourselves reflected back as a being distinct from others, is at once liberating, proving that we are conscious self-directing active agents, whilst also serving as a reminder of our vulnerability and mortality. In this way Nabakov’s friend’s photograph of a brand new baby carriage with the “encroaching air of a coffin” stands as a portent for what
is to come, albeit in reverse.* The ability to communicate on one singular visual surface a sense of time, which oscillates backwards and forwards from past to present whilst being a prescient reminder of the future—reminding us, the viewer, that we are also a part of this ongoing history of Time—is a distinctive phenomena pertaining only to the photograph. This research suggests that this oscillation of time becomes further magnified when viewing the anonymous found photograph, which I argue becomes emblematic of time passing, precisely because there is no other contextual information available to ground it into another alternative narrative.

Both Kristeva and Warner draw on the myth of Narcissus to describe loss, arguing that the identification with the lost subject ultimately reflects and amplifies our own mortality and inevitable death. Writing about Barthes nearly thirty years later in ‘Notes on Love and Photography’ in Degree Zero (2009) Eduardo Cadava and Paola Cortes-Rocca summarise the bewildering collision of time as seen within the photograph: “the dead always are alive, and the alive always are dead without being dead.”96 In the next section I argue how a combined sense of absence and grief for the lost subject and the distance effected by the found photograph are manifest as nostalgia and sentiment.

* Interestingly Warner points out that in myth and folklore (and more recently the stuff of teenage horror movies) the absence of shadows and reflections point to the non–human being and that the reflection is both a reminder and affirmation that we exist: “[T]he absence of shadow or reflection gives shivery proof that something is wrong, that life is diminished, or simply lacking. Both are fundamental to representations of living being: Dante realizes that he is the only person in the underworld to cast a shadow (Purgatorio, III. 20-1).” Warner, Phantasmagoria (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 175.
Photograph 4.

Acrylic, colour photograph, 2012 (9cm x 9cm).

_Soldier_, from the Polaroid collection

A young man stands in the middle space of what looks like a large hall or foyer. He is dressed in a light coloured military uniform and is holding a cap. His hair is closely cropped and he looks youthful and strong. He smiles towards an unseen person on the left of the photograph; the background is fuzzy grey, indistinct and murky. The inadequacy and limitations of the Polaroid flash does not penetrate the depth of the hall where the unknown soldier stands. Instead he looks like he is hovering in a dusky interior haze. The flash does however alight on another figure standing in the background, to the right of the soldier.

_Painting over the found photograph_

The longer I look at this image the more I begin to see a geometry between the two figures and a satisfying triangular relationship develops, suggestive of the finer proportions and the mathematical golden section as found in a Renaissance painting. This visual rhythm between objects and space is entirely photographic happenstance, further accentuated by the lack of depth and flatness of the Polaroid. I add a thick black stripe obliterating the person in the background. The brush stroke is deliberated, thick and truncated, with a slight serif on the top and bottom resulting in a fairly stiff controlled line. The image of the soldier is covered in a transparent wash of black paint and the brush strokes are fluid and generous—although I have tried to keep within the contours of his body. Despite the addition of paint the detailing on his uniform and his facial features are still partially visible. The contrast between the treatments of the two human figures, from thick to fluid alludes to a sense of depth absent in the original Polaroid serving to create an illusion of a foreground and background.
2.4. THE PHOTOGRAPHIC ORPHAN, NOSTALGIA AND THE AUTHENTIC OBJECT

In British law photographs that have become lost and detached from the original maker or owner are classified as “orphaned photographs”, a term that denotes a very human association of abandonment and trauma. The 2008 Select Committee on “Innovation, Universities and Skills Second Report” defined an orphaned work in an academic or published context as, “An orphan work is a copyrighted work where it is difficult or impossible to contact the copyright holder because the author is not known”.  

The very definition of an “orphaned” or found photograph denotes loss and separation, a term that assumes they must have belonged or been produced by a parental body—the originator. The legalities of photographic ownership are complex, varying from country to country. As indicated by Warner these laws have subsumed and naturalised part belief systems and long-standing mythologies about self-representation and identity, which reveal not necessarily a propensity towards superstition but a deep underlying attachment to our reflected self. In describing the myth of Narcissus, a story that has become symbolic of an awakening and self-awareness, the knowledge of which reveals the frailties of human mortality, separation and loss, and of losing the things we love, Kristeva writes:

The child king becomes irredeemably sad before uttering his first words; this is because he has been irrevocably, desperately separated from his mother, a loss that causes him to try to find her again, along with other objects of love, first in the imagination, then in words.

If, as Barthes states, the photograph is always a portent of our inevitable death then the orphaned photograph makes manifest the temporal fragility of our lives. Evoking Nabokov’s quote “The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness,” the orphan photograph consequently acts as a perpetual reminder of both our impending absence and our pre-existence. We construct meaning, a visual biography, through the family photo album, building a body of images that state who we love and who we are, reinforcing societal expectations. Once unloosened from its genealogical ties a photograph’s original meaning quickly unravels—not that it was ever really static in the first place, “Any photograph has multiple meanings” as stated by Sontag.
As observed by Barthes we are not comfortable with discarding or destroying photographs while furniture and other household items seem so much easier to throw away and discard. The deliberate burning or scrapping of photographs, similar to the disposal of books is more difficult, suggestive of censorship and denial. In writing about the role of photography and remembrance in *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance* (2006) Geoffrey Batchen notes how this “illogically warm feeling toward the past, a kind of pleasurable sadness,” as presented by nostalgia was regarded in previous centuries as a problem and a “neurosis… thought to be manifest by a swelling of the brain.”¹⁰² In *On Longing* (1993) Susan Stewart focuses on everyday objects to understand how nostalgia and narrative are used to animate history and the present, recognising that nostalgia is a personal narrative created out of a longing for something that never existed. As with Kristeva’s understanding of melancholia, this longing is bound up with a sense of loss and perceived absence:

Nostalgia is a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience. Rather, it remains behind and before that experience. Nostalgia, like any form of narrative, is always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as a narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack… This point of desire which the nostalgic seeks is in fact the absence that is the very generating mechanism of desire.¹⁰³

Stewart observes that “the silence of the photograph… (its glossy surface reflecting us back and refusing us penetration), makes the eruption of that narrative, the telling of its story, all the more poignant,” going on to suggest that the story providing the explanation will itself become “an object of nostalgia.”¹⁰⁴ The importance of narrative is primary in applying significance to the authentic object as represented by the souvenir:

We do not need or desire souvenirs of events that are repeatable. Rather we need and desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, and events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative… It represents not the lived experience of its maker but the ‘secondhand’ experience of its possessor/owner.¹⁰⁵

In searching for the authentic, Stewart suggests that the constructed narrative projected onto the object is invariably “inward” looking, “it is a narrative of interiority and authenticity. It is not a narrative of the object; it is a narrative of the possessor.”¹⁰⁶ This tendency to reinvent the past is not so much in response to a loss
but that the present is too harsh: “the souvenir is to authenticate a past or otherwise remote experience and, at the same time, to discredit the present. The present is either too impersonal, too looming, or too alienating compared to the intimate and direct experience of contact which the souvenir has as its referent.” Stewart’s observations that the desire to imbue an idea of the past within an object is invariably “inward” looking, is similar to Kristeva’s reflections on narcissism: “as a defense against the emptiness of separation”. Reflecting on this view it could be argued that Barthes’ desperate search to find a photographic representation of his mother, was to guard against the aching emptiness of grief. The Winter Garden photograph becomes a comfort blanket, a touchstone, in an attempt to ameliorate the pain of the present but in doing so reveals the paradox implicit within both the photograph and the souvenir, in that it serves as a constant reminder of the very absence it is supposed to protect against.

The snapshot vernacular photograph is a souvenir, its role is to authenticate the past, providing visual evidence that an event took place. Despite this visual acuity however the found photograph provides no fixed meaning and is open to a continuing narrative construction. Similar to Barthes’ observation of the dizzying effects of time within the photograph, Stewart recognizes that the souvenir’s “function is to envelop the present within the past.” Not dissimilar to Warner and Barthes description of the totemistic qualities imbued on the photograph, Stewart presents that “souvenirs are magical objects” whilst qualifying this description with the acknowledgement that the:

…magic of the souvenir is a kind of failed magic. Instrumentality replaces essence here as it does in the case of all magical objects, but this instrumentality always works an only partial transformation. The place of origin must remain unavailable in order for desire to be generated.

Similarly the meanings attached to the found photograph, with no identifying narrative or external contextualization, are entirely constructed. It has no definitive narrative or sense of order or positioning as you might find in a family photo album. The found photograph in this sense is an abruption and an anomaly, cut loose and floating free from any genealogical ties or grounding narrative its primary message becomes one of loss and fragmentation. Stewart articulates how the search for authenticity invariably results in nostalgia; a supposed narrative projected onto the unknown that ultimately reflects the interior imaginings and desires of the possessor.
In his introduction to ‘Gerhard Richter’s Atlas: The Anomic Archive’ (1999) Benjamin Buchloh echoes Barthes’ observation, that in an attempt to banish death by claiming to eternalize the present, photographs end up conversely doing the opposite.

In the exact duplication of the Real, preferably by means of another reproductive medium—advertisement, photography, etc.—and in the shift from medium to medium, the real vanishes and becomes an allegory of death. But even in its moment of destruction it exposes and affirms itself, it will become the quintessential real and it becomes the fetishism of the lost object.109

In Camera Lucida Barthes questions whether photography has become a vehicle for communicating eternal life, which in a pre-modern age was in the form of verbal history and the Monument, he argues: “For death must be somewhere in society; if it is no longer (or less intensely) in religion, it must be elsewhere; perhaps in this image which produces Death while trying to preserve life.”110 Sontag writes how photographs “state the innocence and vulnerability of lives heading towards their own destruction, and this link between photography and death haunts all photographs of people.”111 This paradigm of wanting to claim and fix the present yet always representing what has past whilst at the same time alerting us, the viewer, to our own doomed presence is explored further in Part Three. In the same chapter I quote Walter Benjamin’s description of the push/pull tension between history and future, past and present, in response to the painting Angelus Novus by Paul Klee. Benjamin vividly describes how the angel on viewing the “wreckage” of history wants to make “whole what has been smashed” instead it is driven forward by the constant pull of a future paradise.112

Conversely for the “melancholic” and as demonstrated by Barthes’ search for a photograph of his deceased mother, the desire to connect with what is lost only serves to further reinforce and magnify what is absent. Stewart argues that the overwhelming desire to control and fix down what is unattainable and which never existed in the first place is ultimately self defeating and is the flaw of the collector*

* It is interesting to compare this definition of the collector with the sociopathic fictional character Frederick Clegg as devised by John Fowles in his novel The Collector (1963). Clegg, as the central character is an amateur lepidopterist, who first observes and then abducts and imprisons Miranda the girl who he has become obsessed by. The novel explores the desire to collect at its most extreme, to want to pin down and restrict the very freedom of something that caused attraction and desire in the first place. Interestingly, within the novel, photography provides a dislocation and distance from the all to real dysfunctional relationship
stating, “the replacement of content with classification, an account of the ways in which collection is the antithesis of creation.” In this sense the predilection for the photograph, in particular the orphaned and found photograph, to evoke nostalgia and feelings of loss, invariably results in a moribund stasis, neither revealing an understanding of the past or the present. It only acknowledges the gap, or the personal pain felt because of the evoked sense of loss and absence. This understanding of nostalgia is not dissimilar to Sontag’s description of the “aesthetic distance” provoked when looking at old photographs. Both Stewart and Sontag are describing how history becomes sanitized through sentiment directed at the passing of time, a process which dilutes the harsher reality of past events, with Sontag stating,

The knowledge gained through still photographs will always be some kind of sentimentalism whether cynical or humanist. It will be a knowledge at bargain prices—a semblance of knowledge, a semblance of wisdom.

The shallow surface of nostalgia in the end reveals nothing about the photograph and only serves to evoke a morbidity about Time. Preoccupied and stifled by a sense of loss for a mythic past reduces the viewer to an inaction and fear of the future, the very antithesis of Benjamin’s description of Angelus Novus, where there is no time to alter the past, despite a desire to do so, rather the propulsion and forward drive must be to learn from the past in order to open up a new future.

between abductor and prisoner. With Clegg unable to respond to physical seduction, preferring instead the pornographic photographs he takes of her—in particular the ones where her head is cut off.
Photograph 5.

*Untitled (Photograph not shown)*

A black and white photograph depicting fourteen men and women sitting at a long table. The photographic subjects have squeezed up close to get into the picture. Most are smiling directly at the camera and everyone seems relaxed and jolly. Beer bottles with brace clasps litter the table. I originally date the photograph loosely from the 1930s. On the back of the photograph someone has written in German. It arrived in the American batch, titled by the vendor “Party–Time–Eat–Drink”.

I had this photograph for some time, shuffled from one box to another, always rising to the top of the disordered pile because of the inherent fascination I had with the subjects. The frozen party atmosphere seduced me for far too long before I made out that one of the men, blurred and indistinct in the background, sitting at the far end of the table, is wearing a Nazi uniform. He is in shadow and is flanked either side by two smiling women, one of whom looks adoringly at him. On close examination however the eagle insignia of a Nazi officer is clearly legible on the left side of his jacket.

From this small piece of information the whole meaning of the photograph changes. Similar to the skewed time shifts when looking at the photograph of Wendy (Photograph 9), this image has the foreboding of an unforeseen prophesy. It resonates because of the apparent joviality of the people in the photograph, at that time unbeknownst as to the concourse of history they were on. I question why should the photograph shock? History happens—has happened—is happening, and I am minded of Barthes’ revelatory experience when as a child he became transfixed by a photograph of a slave master and his slaves, writing, “for my horror and my fascination as a child came from this: that there was a certainty that such a thing existed: not a question of exactitude, but of reality: the historian was no longer the mediator.”

Perhaps it is the complacent domesticity of the image—“Why, everyone is having a good old time”—that causes unease. Or perhaps, I am disturbed that a semblance of a bigger history has slipped through my letterbox, hidden amongst other innocuous celebratory photographs. It acts as a potent reminder that History is not separated and elsewhere, it is as close as a harmless party photograph.

**Painting over the found photograph**

This photograph is the one anomaly in my collection. The unerring subtlety of the disturbing content, which is magnified by the certification and evidential quality of the photograph, makes painting over the photograph difficult. It seems sacrilege to cover over history but then the marks become violent and transgressive, in an attempt to convey the ensuing destruction that the quaint old photograph does not reveal. The application of paint is unsatisfactory however, neither violent nor vivid enough, and as of the time of writing no completion has been found.

* For further details of where this batch of photographs were sourced see Photograph 29. Note the title “Party–Time–Eat–Drink” is not my given name or term, rather it was the ‘Tag’ under which the seller on E-Bay classified this set of photographs, providing a summary of content within the selected photographs for potential buyers.
Photograph 6.

Found Polaroid, 2012 (9cm x 9xm), enamel.

*Man with a Fish*, from the Polaroid collection.

A man crouches down on a slab of tarmac holding a large fish up to the camera. He is smiling proudly for the photograph about to be taken. A line of faded green trees colour in the background. Because of the bright sunlight and limited technology of the Polaroid, the photograph is overexposed and has a bleached and faded look. An effect now much imitated through digital effects by Instagram and other digital photo sharing programs, which seek to evoke a more authentic look associated with memory and the past, as opposed to the digital and ever fleeting present.

**Painting over the found photograph**

I use a dirty magenta paint wash to cover his body, leaving patches of a blue all-star motif on his T-shirt and an exposed elbow and a forearm, which rises up towards the camera. His aviator glasses are obliterated by the paint leaving only shadowy panda shape eyes. A wavelike wash of white paint arches right over the magenta paint.
2.5. PHOTOGRAPHIC DISTANCE
The stasis caused by a surplus of emotion and self-reflection projected onto the photograph is further bound up and made complicated by the photograph’s tendency to beautify its subject. Sontag argues that within photographs,

…there is probably no subject that cannot be beautified; moreover, there is no way to suppress the tendency inherent in all photographs to accord value to their subjects. But the meaning of value itself can be altered…"116

This statement alludes to two issues that are inherent to the photograph. The first being the sense of beauty or aesthetisation that is gained by the emerging distance and “passage” of time between the photograph and viewer, which ultimately diminishes and transforms the photographs meaning, and the second indicates that the meaning itself is fluid and subject to interpretation.

A photograph of 1900 that was affecting then because of its subject would, today, be more likely to move us because it is a photograph taken in 1900. The particular qualities and intentions of photographs tend to be swallowed up in the generalized pathos of time past. Aesthetic distance seems built into the very experience of looking at photographs, if not right away, then certainly with the passage of time. Time eventually positions most photographs, even the most amateurish, at the level of art.117

In the same section Sontag acknowledges that distance refers not only to temporal shifts but also to the anaesthetizing effects of photography stating: “Images transfix. Images anaesthetize,” referring directly to how the global photographic cataloguing of atrocities makes “the horrible seem more ordinary, making it appear familiar, remote inevitable.”118 Sontag describes how the photograph is “a powerful instrument for depersonalising our relation to the world”119 stating that the photographic image creates a “pseudo-familiarity”, which however shocking reduces our empathetic response when actions take place in real time.120 The photograph creates and magnifies a sense of distance, precisely because it has already happened; it is always inevitable; all we can do is view it from the safety of the present. Time and distance becomes the mediator. The past has already happened. Nothing can be done or undone—in this way the photograph is always a passive receptacle with any revisionism or interpretation reflecting present preoccupations and concerns.
Sontag’s reference to aesthetic distance draws on the writer and playwright Bertolt Brecht’s often quoted statement questioning the value of photographic reality. The original quote as stated is taken from Walter Benjamin’s *Little History of Photography* (1931):

The situation becomes complicated because a simple reproduction of reality says less than ever about reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG says next to nothing about these institutions. True reality has slipped over into the functional. The reification of human relationships—the factory, say—means that they are no longer explicit. So in fact something must be built up, something ‘artificial’, ‘formed’, ‘posed’. 121

Similarly Sontag refers to Walter Benjamin in his 1934 address for the Institute for the Study of Fascism, Paris, where he states that the camera, ‘is now incapable of photographing a tenement or a rubbish heap without transfiguring it. Not to mention a river dam or an electric cable factory: in front of these, photography can only say, ‘How beautiful.’ … It has succeeded in turning abject poverty itself, by handling it in a modish, technically perfect way, into an object of enjoyment.”122

This notion of “aesthetic distance” resonates further when viewing found vernacular photographs. Devoid of any supplementary history or contextualisation such as an identity and location (with the exception of a few photographs, whose content provokes a very particular reading—see Photograph 5), most of the photographs in my collection are detached from any contextual narrative. The found photograph seems to exemplify the inherent contradictions implicit within the photograph. The interpretations are invariably nostalgic whilst the absolute silence and impenetrability only serve to exaggerate the perception of distance and detachment. In writing about the Krupp photograph where “the camera’s rendering of reality must always hide more than it discloses” Sontag acknowledges:

In contrast to the amorous relation, which is based on how something looks, understanding is based on how it functions. And functioning takes place in time. Only that which narrates can make us understand.123

The anaesthetizing effect and aesthetic distance as described by Sontag provides an impenetrable veneer to the photographs in my collection. They are ornaments of time passing. So much so that when a found photograph does reveal an identity linking it back to a harsher reality and truth about history as seen in the Nazi photograph (Photograph 5) it serves as a salutary warning as to the pitfalls of
becoming seduced by a sentiment—albeit one with a humanist intent—that both idolises and mourns the loss of beauty and vitality of the people “that-have-been” as presented in the photograph.
Found photograph (9cm x 9cm), enamel

Boy

A black and white square format photograph of a small boy exudes a mid twentieth century all–American wholesomeness, fresh and clean. The background is a perfect mid grey—no fuss, accentuating the minimalist quality of the picture. The angle of the boy’s body sits slightly to the left of the photograph but he leans into the right (his left). He is looking coyly down at the floor with a self-aware smile. Sitting at this angle his bent head occupies the most central point of the photograph and the light, natural or otherwise, is reflected off the side of his closely cropped fair hair. He has a wonderful sculpted shape to his skull, which calls for the tracing of a line right up, around his boyish protruding ear, to the top of his head, and then sweeping down, following the brow and cheekbone and into his chin. He has a dimple.

Taken nigh on fifty years ago the boy’s time has already unfolded. His future then, has slipped into reverse.

Painting over the found photograph
The original photograph was destroyed through the constant experimentation with paint. The remainder is a digital copy. In this case the original photographic object exudes no more of a special quality than the digital photograph. The ‘power’ is the photographic subject that conveys such beauty and evokes a particular reading about time—He was a boy, in the past tense. Where is he fifty years hence? His lost and unknown identity becomes so overwhelming in the photograph that for the purposes of this publication I have selected a painted over photograph that conceals and masks the face of this unknown man-child.

Destruction and transformation
The line between painting onto the photograph to find the right tensile balance that lifts the photograph out of its nostalgic reverie and destroying it totally is a fraught one. For the
purposes of this publication I have chosen not to show the images that I classify as destroyed. Partly, I view these discarded images as casualties of a visual experimentation; failed tests that did not make the editorial cut, however I also recognize an underpinning ethic at work. These images are often the only remaining evidence of people who once lived. My practice is heightened by the realization of this—recognizing that I am either working over the only remaining original photograph or marking the digital replication of a lived person. This recognition or respect for that “being” never fully goes away, as revealed by the accompanying writings. My attachment to the unknown photographic subject often grows the more I observe and am with *them* in my studio. This underlying ethic and respect for the lived past represents the push, pull and power of the photographic image, into which nostalgia; sentiment and supposition are projected. It is this tussle between attraction and frustration, respect and detachment for the unknown photographic image, which I am constantly trying to grapple with through the research. It is because of these mixed feelings, alongside the editorial constraints, that I choose not to publically disclose the photographs that are either irreparably damaged or yet to reach a point of painterly resolution.
2.6. ACTION, INTERVENTION AND APPROPRIATION AS TACTICS TO REAWAKEN THE PHOTOGRAPH

Following in a tradition of artists who deploy within their work methods of disruption and intervention to question prevailing assumptions and conventions, my practice aims to disrupt the status quo by appropriating an order of photography predominantly used for domestic purposes. Through the application of paint onto the photographic surface the photograph is reframed in an attempt to penetrate and shake up the “quotidian existence” of the found photograph. The appropriation and representation of ordinary objects as art, either as a challenge against pre-existing notions of originality or by confronting definitions of Art, can be traced back to Duchamp’s “readymades” or “objet trouvé”. The definition of “objet trouvé” in André Breton’s “Dictionnaire abrégé du Surréalisme” originally written in 1938 was seen as “an ordinary object elevated to the dignity of a work of art by the mere choice of an artist”.124 Similarly artists associated with the Dadaist movement, in particular John Heartfield and Hannah Höch, appropriated everyday materials and represented them in the form of collage and montage in order to challenge the acceptable definitions of art and notions of the ordinary. In Photography and Painting in the work of Gerhard Richter (1999) Benjamin Buchloh reflects on the “latent dichotomy” inherent within the Dada collage/montage aesthetics, which he calls “the order of perceptual shock and the principle of estrangement… and the order of the statistical collection or the order of the archive”.

The structural emphasis on discontinuity and fragmentation in the initial phase of Dada-derived photomontage introduced the subject’s perceptual field to the ‘shock’ experiences of daily existence in advanced industrial culture. Whilst the metonymic procedures of photomontage and their continuous emphasis on the fissure and the fragment—at least in their initial appearance—operated to dismantle the myths of unity and totality.125

Buchloh acknowledges that the original Dadaists: Heartfield, Höch, Gustav Klucis, El Lissitzky and Alexander Rodchenko, who first initiated photomontage and who celebrated randomness and the arbitrary possibilities of the archive as a response to the complexity of modernity, later rejected the methods associated with this form of “estrangement”, claiming that this outlook was “apolitical and anti-communicative”. In the “second moment of Dada collage” the emphasis moved to a more constructed and deliberated form of human intervention, which according to
Buchloh called “for a reintroduction of the dimensions of narrative, communicative action and instrumentalized logic within the structural organizations of montage aesthetics.”

In her essay ‘Image Simulations, Computer Manipulations: Some Considerations’ (2004) the artist and writer Martha Rosler examines and draws on the history of Photomontage and Photo collage, to explain that photography from its very conception had an “illusionistic” tendency inherent within it. Rosler cites the openly manipulated and constructed photomontages of the Dadaists, in particular the German photomontagist John Heartfield, as representing a more truthful account of reality than the “mere” surface of a photograph, claiming that whilst the “origins of photomontage as an aesthetic-political technique are not certain”, through its application the Dadaists were “to disrupt the smooth, seamless surface of quotidian urban existence.”

Rosler asserts that “manipulation”, rather than being viewed as a problem, should as an act of intervention be championed:

If we want to call up more hopeful or positive uses of manipulated images, we must choose images in which manipulation is itself apparent, not just as a form of artistic reflexivity but to make a larger point about the truth value of photographs and the illusionistic elements in the surface (and even definition of) reality.

Differentiating between artists who use direct methods of appropriation with no additional intervention or manipulation, where the aim is to “simply highlight power relations in society” as seen in the work of the 1980’s appropriation artists such as Sherrie Levine, who represent existing iconic photographs, unchanged (‘After Walker Evans: 4’ [1981] originally produced by the American photographer Walker Evans). In “Photography and the Simulacral” Krauss refers to originality as representing both the artistic impulse and the notion of a unique art object, arguing that photography’s “forms of multiplicity cut deeply against the notion of originality as an aesthetic condition available to photographic practice,” an argument that draws on Walter Benjamin’s ultimately flawed vision that photographic reproduction would release art from its cultish confines of adoration. Krauss refers to poststructuralist ideas of simulacra, surrounded “not by reality but by the reality effect, the product of simulation and signs.” She argues that photography “put into question the whole concept of the uniqueness of the art object, the originality of its author, the coherence of the oeuvre within which it is made, and the individuality of
so-called expression.” Krauss also attacks the notion of artistic originality stating that “The inw
ardness of the artist as a reserve of consciousness that is fundamentally different from the world of appearances is a basic premise of Western art. It is the fundamental difference on which all other differences are based.” Writing in the 1980s Krauss and other poststructuralist theorists influenced many artists, such as Cindy Sherman who through role play imitated media stereotypes within her photographs, alongside Sherrie Levine and Richard Prince, who appropriated and re-presented media images as a critique against ideas of originality and authenticity. This positioning and use of direct appropriation is questioned by Rosler, who argues that such a strategy is ineffectual:

The flat refusal of “new production” (which mistakenly assumes that reproduction is no production) of some quotational artists is deeply romantic in continuing to identify creativity as the essence of art. This jettisons, for example, a more open-ended idea of art as stemming from and returning to lived relations.

Into this situation, which reduces the artists to a mere spectator, Rosler claims that there is “no room for oppositional human agency” arguing that explicit manipulation and intervention is able to pierce the photographic illusion.

Rosler’s arguments draw on a particular Marxist framework, which includes both Brecht and Walter Benjamin who, writing in the 1930s, sought to expose the constructed social nature implicit within forms of representation. In The Little History of Photography Benjamin traces the early development of photography as it moved into mass production. Influenced by the writings of Karl Marx, Benjamin used the term “phantasmagoria” extensively in his writing from 1927–1940 to explain the changing architectural face of Paris and the rise of “commodity fetishism”. The term “phantasmagoria” is used by Marx in Capital and according to the writer Margaret

* In a recent legal case that challenged the use of appropriated photographs the American artist Richard Prince and his New York gallerist, Lawrence Gagosian, lost a copyright lawsuit brought by the French photographer Patrick Cariou. Prince had appropriated photographic images from Cariou’s publication Yes, Rasta (2008) of Jamaican Rastafarians for his exhibition “Canal Zone,” (8th November–20 December, 2008) at the Gagosian Gallery, New York. Despite altering the appropriated photographs through cropping, collaging and over-painting the judge ruled against the defence claim that the artwork was transformative in accordance to the American legal argument of “fair use” within law.

Cohen has been translated from “phantasmagorische” to “fantastic.” in the Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling translation.\textsuperscript{135}

There is a physical relation between physical things. But it is different with commodities. There, the existence of the things \textit{qua} commodities, that the value-relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connexion with their physical properties and with the material relations arising there from. There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.\textsuperscript{136}

In her article “Walter Benjamin’s Phantasmagoria” Cohen argues that Benjamin both extends and makes an analogous link between Marx’s commodity fetishism and an early form of optical illusion, invented in the late 1790s by “doctor-aeronaut” Etienne-Gaspard Robertson, which projected images onto a screen.\textsuperscript{137} In his introduction to “\textit{The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media}” Michael Jennings, explains that Benjamin used the term to describe, “the world of commodity capitalism: an environment so suggestively “real” that we move through it as if it were given and natural, when in fact it is a social construct.”\textsuperscript{138} The photograph, described by Sontag as representing a “thin slice of space as well as time”\textsuperscript{139} convinces us of another reality. The found photograph precisely because it carries no additional information as to who, where and why it was taken, becomes entirely emblematic of time. Whilst the evidential quality of the photograph provides assurance that the event must have happened (Man with a Fish), the sense of conceptual distance conveyed through time passed, nostalgia and the flatness of the photograph enshrine it as a picture. Sontag observes that:

The camera makes reality atomic… Any photograph has multiple meanings… The ultimate wisdom of the photographic image is to say: ‘There is the surface. Now think—or rather feel, intuit—what is beyond it, what the reality must be like if it looks this way.’ Photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy.\textsuperscript{140}

Sontag recognises the isolation and disconnectedness of the “found object” and connects it with the unknowable meaning of the photograph, arguing that photographs “have the status of found objects—unpremeditated slices of the world. Thus, they trade simultaneously on the prestige of art and the magic of the real. They are clouds of fantasy and pellets of information.”\textsuperscript{141} The found photograph then,
exemplifies and redoubles this uncertainty, evidencing time but remaining resolutely distant. Using Rosler’s interpretation of manipulation as a political statement, the act of intervention whether through montage or in relation to my practice—painting over found old photographs may go some way to expose and disturb the re-imagined construct of what is read into the photograph, with the paint providing an alternative antidote to the nostalgia and overwhelming silence within the photograph.

Painting over found photographs raises questions as to the conventions surrounding self-representation, identity and ownership that have become embedded within the photograph. Part of the associative negativity arises from a long-standing cultural reverence accorded to notions of ownership and authorship, whereby methods of appropriation and the using of objects and images originally made by others for a different purpose, disturbs the order and status quo regarding the attachments of objects to people. As argued, the found photograph cut free from parental ties becomes a residue and palimpsest of existence. I argue that the addition of paint shatters this illusion, shifting authorship from one that is neutral to having an explicit purpose and direction, an action that ultimately disturbs and refocuses the interminably fluid meaning and reading of the found photograph. Through the addition of paint the photograph is moved from the domestic and vernacular into the sphere of art. Sontag acknowledges that in general “photography is not practiced by most people as an art. It is mainly a social rite, a defense against anxiety, and a tool of power” going on to add that “photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal” and that they “help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure.” Using tactics long associated with artistic rupture and challenge, the found photograph removed from the domestic realm and positioned within an art context, exposes just how elevated and precious the unassuming ordinary photograph has become.
Photograph 8.

Found Polaroid, 2012, (9cm x 9cm), enamel.

Blue undone, from the Polaroid collection.

Do you remember when, back along.
The sun shone golden and time was an interminable straight line, scored deeply onto paper.
Most probably blue, certainly indelible. Unwavering at first, fixed with an earnest focus and intent. The slightest shift in pressure, almost imperceptible. Almost. A slackening of flesh, a slippage, a blue stain bleeding into clean.

* Inspired by Andre Breton’s reference to Black Humour as an antidote to sentimentality – a condition “that always appears against a blue background” (see next section ‘Black Humour’).
Photograph 9.

From Some Children Artist Book I, 2012 (18cm x 18cm), enamel, pen.

Untitled, from the Baby series

The photograph is of “Wendy” (not her real name) which is written on the reverse of the photograph, followed by “one year old” and then a date, ending in 1967. The photograph is a standard 7x5 inch black and white studio portrait of a delightful chubby baby. Wendy is looking out towards the left of the photographer, her eyes are engaged with someone or something and she is about to break into a full smile. Her eyelashes are so long, I have to scrutinize the photograph to see whether they have been drawn on, as was the trend within mid twentieth century children’s portraiture. A studio light is focused on Wendy’s face creating a halo effect around her head. Presented to us as a picture of idealised cherubic cuteness—this baby Wendy is every bit an American cliché.

Why I Googled Wendy

I do not usually “google” the photographs in my collection. Mostly I have no desire to become detective, chasing tails to connect lost photographs with past origins; neither do the photographs reveal the necessary information to do so. Often the photographs offer only a date, and very occasionally a note as found on ‘Diane’ (Photograph 22). With Wendy I had a date and a first name. Rightly or wrongly, I surmised that Wendy was born a year previous to the date written on the back, which I took for a birthday and not a reference to when the photograph was taken. Googling “Wendy” and the birthdate very quickly revealed a series of news articles documenting a court case, which detailed how Wendy (whether the photographic Wendy or another) was attacked and raped in the 1970s and then again in the mid 1980’s. The final summary revealed that Wendy had been so deeply affected by the original attack that it had limited her social skills, possibly leading to the subsequent rape.

This story may or may not have any relationship to the cherubic baby looking at me across my desk. But because the photograph divulges nothing, the potential connection stays as a hypothetical possibility. Unlike the Nazi photograph, Wendy’s narrative still exists in the realm of uncertain conjecture, a tenuous probability compared to the definitive future context.
within which the Nazi photograph is read. The beatific portrait of Wendy situated in a permanent photographic halo exemplifies how little we know about the anonymous photograph, other than she existed and was posed and placed in accordance to societal expectations.

This photograph, possibly because of the hint of a darker outcome at odds to the presented angelic bonny baby, seems to exemplify the “dizzying” temporal shifts within the photograph. Whether it is Kraeauer writing about his Grandmother, Benjamin reflecting on the photograph of the Newhaven fishwife, or Barthes’ palpable grief–stricken search for an “essence” of his mother in a photograph—all write about the strangeness of looking at the presence of a person in a photograph whose future was still to unfold, whilst we the viewer from the present, already know the ending. In this way photographs seem to operate in a conceptual wormhole, providing the viewer with a porthole to a frozen past, but with no recourse to change history, unlike the time–travel vision of most science fiction, where the protagonist is free to scissor backwards and forwards, from past, to present, to future, and back again.

Painting over the found photograph
The original photograph of Wendy was destroyed by overpainting experiments. The action of painting over Wendy and other baby photographs was aggressive and violent. Mixing Rose Madder with blacks and greys, creating muddy pools so thick they take on a three-dimensionality, spewing over the flat polished surface of the photograph. This aggression did not respond specifically towards Wendy’s impending doom, rather it was a tirade against the picture perfection of these angelic posed photographic subjects. Included in this series are photographs of myself as a baby, posed and presented like a doll, artificial and pretend (see Appendix 2, Baby series). By comparison the paint is real, it has substance bringing solidity to the clouds of photographic fantasy and gloss.
2.7. BLACK HUMOUR

*The sentimentalist is he who would enjoy without incurring the immense debtorship for a thing done.*

James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922)

By positioning where my research sits in relation to arguments concerning the photographic context, I argue that the genre of found vernacular photographs engenders and evokes more than any other photographic sub category, profound feelings of loss, nostalgia and sentimentality. In working with this form of photography my responses as recorded alongside the photographs, are indicative of the prevailing symptomology, whereby I too become subsumed with sentiment. It is the reason why I collect found vernacular photographs, they are fascinating visual documents of lives lived elsewhere in another time. But revealed in the documented relationships with the found photographs in my collection, is a deep frustration created by the paradoxical representation of the photographic subject seeming so alive and vital yet at the same time being utterly unknowable, impenetrable and distant. The sense of remove is further compounded by the very likely (morbid) probability that the photographic subject I am viewing is dead. Teichmann describes the feeling of wanting to possess the photograph as all encompassing to the point of violence. The void between viewer and what is contained within the found photograph is vast. The resultant nostalgia and sentiment are ultimately limiting. As described by Stewart they reveal little or nothing about the past, only reinforce and compound the feelings of absence in the present.

Whilst the found photograph may stir feelings of empathy and a humanist connection with other people, the over-riding message is of time passing; a temporal hallucination in the form of a photograph and a precent reminder of the sequential order of life and death. In this space melancholia lurks, affecting a grieving process for something that never was—of a constructed past that as Kristeva states is entirely “ideological.” A little investigation and closer examination of some of the photographs in my collection reveal a disquieted truth about the past (Photograph 5 and possibly Wendy, Photograph 9). These revelations question my tendency to confer a beauty onto the people represented within the photograph, purely because the photograph provides (probably) the only remaining visual evidence that they once existed. This tendency, humanistic in origin, is very strong and Sontag acknowledges, that with the possible exception of photographs depicting horrors such as the Nazi
camps, most “photographs do not keep their emotional charge” with the “particular qualities and intentions... swallowed up in the generalized pathos of time past”, rendering the photograph into an aesthetic object.144

As a collector and an artist however this form of nostalgia becomes a contaminant. It represents a non-productive indulgent emotion that affects stasis, which in turn manifests itself as a frustration at the limits and purpose of my collection. Kristeva argues that from the raw experience of loss and through the identification that something is missing or lacking, creativity is founded, “A writer must at one time or another have been in a situation of loss—of ties, of meaning—in order to write.”145 The focus then becomes how to puncture the passivity of the photograph, to utilise this frustration to reactivate and replace what is missing, to propose a violent action that challenges the nostalgic stupor and which might awaken the photograph from its soporific slumber, and in doing so create something new that makes explicit the visual faction of the photograph.

Paint by its very materiality and presentness (as explored in Part Three, 3.2 The Presence of Paint) sits in direct opposition to the mirrored surface of the photograph. The paint is abrasive, glutinous, jarring and alien—it is not expected, it is wrong; it is visceral, violent and bloody and it destroys the stasis and frozen time of the photographic space. The traceable marks and brush strokes are a signature of action and authorial intent, unlike the neutrality of the photograph, where the author becomes secondary, and where meaning is slippery and uncertain. The paint upsets the stifling conformity and expectations of this order of photograph. It is destructive and productive at the same time, similar to “katharsis” in the Aristotelian sense of tragedy, where Aristotle claims that tragedy is “an imitation (mimesis) of a serious and complete action of some magnitude... By means of pity and fear it achieves the katharsis of such emotions”.146 Interpretations of Aristotle’s Poetics (384-322 B.C.) suggest that emotions such as pity and fear are purged through the traumatic experience. In the context of this research, nostalgia and sorrow/death and absence evoke pity and fear respectively. Through the acknowledgement of these emotions towards the photograph and then simultaneously denying and transforming them by the momentous abruption and disruption caused by the application of paint, a kathartic experience might be called for, both for the author and the audience. The application of paint onto the surface of the photograph is a transgression; it is not normal, it is suggestive of defacement. Through its explicit coding that is always tied
to an author unlike the “transparent envelope” of the photograph that democratises and neutralises the producer, the painterly intrusion breaks the photographic silence conveying a message of action and aggression.

Actioned in this way, the paint destroys the very photograph I am both attracted to and frustrated by, as seen in my relationship with the series of photographs entitled The Woman with Big Sunglasses (Photograph 12–16). The painterly intervention becomes a form of black humour similar to the founder of the Surrealist movement André Breton’s use of the term. Breton referred to black humour, in his edited Anthologie de l’Humour Noir (1940), to enable a psychological “process permitting us to brush aside reality in what is most painful about it.”147 In recognising that Breton’s humour was often violent, and about breaking taboos, the writer Anthony Caleshu, observes that “Breton’s humour noir, … wasn’t so much interested in perpetuating laughs from offense but the understanding that such humour is the result of a system of ‘defence’.”148 Breton writes in his introduction to the Anthology of Black Humour, that black humour is “the mortal enemy of sentimentality, which seems to lie perpetually in wait—sentimentality that always appears against a blue background.”149 Caleshu sees Breton’s description of sentimentality as reflecting a sense of melodrama and a form of “self absorption”150 a process of self preoccupation, which is not dissimilar to Kristeva’s writings on loss and melancholia. In his preface Breton quotes Freud’s description of humour in full:

Little jokes and the comic, humour has something liberating about it; but it also has something of grandeur and elevation […] the grandeur in it clearly lies in the triumph of narcissism, the victorious assertion of the ego’s invulnerability. The ego refuses to be distressed by the provocations of reality, to let itself be compelled to suffer. It insists that it cannot be affected by the traumas of the external world.151

Obliterating the photograph I so desire through the application of paint becomes a dark joke, a risible attack that mocks and then punctuates the suffocating nostalgia and impenetrable silence of the photograph.* By attempting to break deeply held taboos and daring to mark and disrupt the conventions surrounding the

* Freud’s reference to “narcissism” and my recognition of a desire felt towards the found photograph, which I then conversely destroy through the application of paint as a way of ameliorating my personal conflict (desire/repulsion) and a public confrontation of prevailing conventions concerning photography, invariably raises questions concerning the gendered voice and art practice, which though I acknowledge as an important arena, is not the central focus of this research.
vernacular photograph, the joke in its blackest form is ultimately destructive. Using paint in this way, to obliterate and destroy the underlying photograph, presents a vital opposite to the “platitudinous” silence of the photograph. In the photographs where the application of the paint is partial, as seen in the Polaroid series, the familiar language of vernacular photographs is recognizable and perhaps is still capable of evoking the sentiments associated with looking at old black and white or Polaroid photographs (Photograph 4, Soldier). The confusing presence of paint on the photographic surface however disturbs and destabilizes these initial responses, cutting through the veil of nostalgia and hauling the photograph out of a lost past and into the present.

The photographic flatness represents both the physical photographic surface, which is smoothed to a highly polished sheen, and also the conceptual impenetrability of never knowing, never being able to get under the plastic veneer, the shimmering skin, to reconnect with their origins to gain a sense of who they were and what they did. This inapproachability becomes paramount when viewing some of the photographic subjects in my collection (Photograph 12–16 The Woman with Big Sunglasses, Photograph 3 The Sailor), who seem so vital, so evident, reflecting a strong sense of being—a unique identity but in the end reveal nothing more. Offering no further information that connects them with a reality other than they existed they illustrate Kraus’ reference to the “reality effect”. The photograph remains resolutely silent and closed, sometimes eliciting pity and a sense of loss, a fleetingly temporary emotion and an indulgence. Isolated in this way the photographs wait to be sequenced and framed in numerous fictions, without which they float free of any meaning or purpose. It is at this point that I see the photographic subjects in my collection as both tragic and comedic, all seeming to radiate happiness but with a crushing reality I have to acknowledge that it is likely that they are all most probably dead (Photograph 12–16 The Woman with Sunglasses, Photograph 3 The Sailor, Photograph 10 Mr Ranger).

In this context paint becomes the deathly antidote to the anaesthetic quality of the photograph. Utilising the methods underpinning black humour the application of paint provides an absolution—through a process of violence and disruption. By physically puncturing the maudlin nostalgia the paint stabilizes and fixes down the temporal fluctuations, freeing the photograph from itself and by doing so destroying it.
Mr Ranger—a name I give to a black and white 1940s portrait of a man dressed in a cowboy hat, wearing what looks like a sheriff’s or scout’s shirt, complete with large studded buttons and shoulder lapels. He has a small badge sitting on the neck fold of his ample collar. A little too indistinct, I consider whether it is the insignia of a scout group, an international movement that was booming in the 1930s. Whilst his face portrays a feminine softness his one visible oversized masculine ear and receding hairline assures me otherwise. This man is dead, or either very old. But here in my studio a photographic trace of him remains, a flicker of an unsure, awkward smile forever about to break.

Preoccupied by death and it’s inevitability. Provoked by the unknowability of this man and the now completed trajectory of his life, the drawn graphic mark provides a welcome release, a comic turn, drawing circles and dots over his eyes and his desired, unreachable and most probably, long dead ear.
All these people gazing out, expectant... for the next day to arrive, for the next moment to unravel.

Unravelling. Unravelled.

Photographs lay in piles, strewn across tables, staying in the same place often for months on end whilst I search and sift through endless photographs. How easy it is for these anonymous faces to penetrate and infiltrate my consciousness, bringing to mind the photograph in the parting shot of Stanley Kubrick’s psychological horror film *The Shining* (1980). In the film, the main character Jack Torrance (played by actor Jack Nicholson) slowly becomes divorced from reality. Unhinged by the unseen hotel guests he finally becomes locked forever in a frozen past—literally in death and as symbolically reflected in the last scene, where Jack materialises as a printed ghost in an old 1930’s photograph of the hotel.

I am surprised by the strength of attachment I feel towards the photographic images. Familiarity breeds a certain fraternisation and on entering the studio the photographs have become like old friends.

“There you are Mr Ranger.”

“Poor little Wendy.”

Comfortable pieces of furniture permanently arrested in my attic—multiple Dorian Grays—forever youthful. The longer I look at them the more attached I become, when, eventually, a shift occurs—memory and familiarity moves to claim ownership—from unknown to a belonging.
PART THREE
3. THE PHOTOGRAPH AND PAINTING

At the juncture where the paint meets the photographic surface the differences between the two mediums could not be starker. The paint sitting on the surface of the photograph is an alien imposition, globular and abstract in colour and form. It is not flat like the photograph; it has a three–dimensionality, which sits atop of the mirrored platitudinous surface of the photograph. Unlike the photograph, where the mediation of technological production renders the author and maker as invisible, the painted mark links back to the body and author “it tells whether the painter sat or stood or crouched in front of the canvas. Paint is a cast made of the painter’s movements, a portrait of the painter’s body and thoughts.”

Writing about the artist Cy Twombly in *Cy Twombly: Paintings and Drawings, 1954-1977*, Barthes links together painting and writing, observing that both mediums always lead back to the body:

..the painter helps us understand that writing’s truth is neither in its messages nor in the system of transmission... but in the hand which presses down and traces a line, i.e., in *the body which throbs*...

By comparison the vernacular photograph, is not an art form, it is a vehicle where there are no necessary differentials of skill in the production; the focus is entirely on what the photograph depicts. Invariably the vernacular domestic photograph is always of something. In her essay ‘A Note on Photography and the Simulacral’ Krauss writes “the most common photographic judgment is not about value but about identity, being a judgment that reads things generically; that figures reality in terms of what sort of thing an x or a y is—thus the repetitious judgments in terms of ‘it’s a so–and–so’.” Similarly Barthes, in his essay *The Photographic Message* (1961), writes that the photograph pertains a “special status... it is a message without a code; from which proposition an important corollary must immediately be drawn: the photographic message is a continuous message.” Barthes goes on to ask whether there are “other messages without a code?” reflecting that within the “imitative’ arts” such as drawing, painting, cinema and theatre there:

…comprise[s] two messages: a *denoted* message, which is the *analogon* itself, and a *connoted* message, which is the manner in which the society to a certain extent communicates what it thinks of it. This duality of messages is evident in all reproductions other than photographic ones: there is no drawing, no matter how exact, whose very exactitude is not turned into a style (the style of ‘verism’).
Barthes points out in *Camera Lucida* that the photograph “is never anything but an antiphon of ‘Look,’ ‘See,’ ‘Here it is’... This is why, insofar as it is licit to speak of a photograph, it seemed to me just as improbable to speak of the Photograph.”\(^{156}\) He goes on to suggest that such a response arises because the photograph is

…‘a weightless, transparent envelope’... A specific photograph, in effect, is never distinguished from its referent (from what it represents), or at least it is not immediately or generally distinguished from its referent...\(^{157}\)

In ‘The Imperfect of the Object Glass’ (1990) Ann Banfield observes that the photograph is “Produced by a machine, by a scientific instrument, by a mechanical process, the recorded image is no longer anyone’s sensation.”\(^{158}\) A position that echoes Barthes, observation that “the Photograph is indifferent to all intermediaries: it does not invent; it is authentication itself,”\(^{159}\) a process which he connects back to the notion of the imprint, which carries with it religious connotations:

Photography has, something to do with resurrection: might we not say of it what the Byzantines said of the image of Christ which impregnated St. Veronica's napkin: that it was not made by the hand of man, acheiropoietos?\(^{160}\)

With the paint sitting atop of the photograph these differences become extreme. The paint blocks the “Look, See” of the photograph, mixing up the different visual languages and shifting the photograph from its perceived connection to a past reality, to one that demands a more symbolic interpretation associated with language and meaning. Sontag writes:

While a painting, even one that meets photographic standards of resemblance, never does more than state an interpretation, a photograph never does less than register an emanation (light waves reflected by objects)—a material vestige of its subject in a way that no painting can be.\(^{161}\)

Despite these fundamental differences between the photograph and the hand drawn line, a number of writers have attempted to connect the impulse to draw and the need to take photographs. In *What do Pictures Want?* Mitchell recounts the classical Roman story in Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History* (AD 77–79) where the Maid of Corinth, in an attempt to hold onto a representation of her lover who is shortly going abroad, draws an outline around the shadow of his head. Mitchell reflects that the “shadow is not itself a living thing, but its likeness and metonymic,
icon and index. It is thus a ghostly effigy that is ‘fixed’ as in a photographic process”
going on to state, “drawing like photography is seen as to originate in the art of fixing
the shadow.”  

162 Taking a similar position, Michael Newman in *The Stage of Drawing* (2003) refers to Pliny’s classical story to suggest that the mark or drawing, like the
photograph, represents through form the need to make “contact” with the thing that is
being represented. 

163 This way of linking the underlying methodology and impulse to
make photographs and drawings together through a need to connect or make contact
with what is being represented is an interesting one. The found photographs in my
collection are “relics”—representing a direct link and contact, made at the very point
of conception, with the then live subjects. But unlike the Turin Shroud or the drawn
line, the photograph has not touched skin or been directly made by the human hand. It
is always one step removed, like peering through a shop window at the out of reach
delights, or a mirrored portal through which another time can be viewed but where
entry is denied. My desire to paint on the photograph, using a material that speaks of
the human, “the body that throbs” could be read as an attempt to connect and make
contact with the photographic subject and the lost past—to reawaken and jar the
photograph from its soporific slumber and to pierce the irrefutable silence albeit by
using a medium that is so obviously oppositional and different in form to the
photograph.
3.1. FROM PAST TO PRESENT: THE TEMPORAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE PAINT AND PHOTOGRAPH

Despite fading prints and dated fashions certain photographs within my collection seem to communicate a strong sense of presence and being of the now. Photographs from the *Sailor* series or *The Woman with Big Sunglasses* seem so vital, offering a window into another life and another time. If only I could reach across the photographic threshold and see. This sense of vitality only serves to intensify the inapproachability and distance between the photographic subject and myself as the viewer. The photograph plays tricks with my sense of time and I reconstruct their lives over and over again through numerous fictionary postulations. I cannot reach out to the people in the photograph. Only the paint seems to offer an absolution, its external physicality and otherness tempering down the “dizzying” temporal fluctuations within the photograph. Sitting on the surface of the photograph, the paint is an intrusion providing a fixture, a date, a time and place, redirecting and narrowing down the meaning, from unknowable to an action that can be read as deliberated over and with a purpose.

A vivid example as to how the introduction of paint on the surface of the photograph can channel the temporal uncertainty of the photograph can be seen in Gerhard Richter’s “overpainted” photographs, started in 1989 and exhibited as a large body of work in the 2009 exhibition and accompanying catalogue, *Gerhard Richter: Overpainted Photographs*. The photographs that Richter paints over are defined as rejects, deemed unsuitable for his family photo album for being either too “unspecific, out of focus, or duplicates”. The paint is applied using a large mechanical Doctor blade, as used for screen-printing, which is scraped across the image with varying force. The results are intriguing, the images are mostly 15x10cm scale, a size that encourages an intimate viewing point, the thick viscous paint stretches across the surface, sometimes so thickly it obscures much of the photograph. The paint sits heavy on the flat photographic surface, it seems visceral and alive by contrast, a globular living mass reminiscent of a cellular slime mould heaving slowly across the polished photographic surface. Despite being applied several years ago, the paint seems to occupy the present, being of the now, whilst a glimpse of the photograph underneath represents a different time frame, referring to back then. This notion of painting conveying a sense of “presentness” compared to other art forms was explored in Michael Fried’s 1967 essay *Art and Objecthood*, where he attempts to
elevate modernist painting from theatre. Fried describes theatre as “the duration of experience ... of time passing and to come, simultaneously approaching and receding, as if apprehended in an infinite perspective...”¹⁶⁵ By contrast he argues that painting is distinct from other artforms:

It is this continuous and entire presentness, amounting, as it were, to the perpetual creation of itself, that one experiences as a kind of instantaneousness, as though if only one were infinitely more acute, a single infinitely brief instant would be long enough to see everything, to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it... I want to claim that it is by virtue of their presentness and instantaneousness that modernist painting and sculpture defeat theater.¹⁶⁶

Whilst these distinctions between theatre and other forms of art are no longer valid and are perhaps indicative of the period Fried was writing”, Fried’s use of the term “presentness” to describe how an image can encompass a whole is useful when applied to the disjuncture caused when paint disturbs the photographic surface. Arguably Richter’s overpainted photographs communicate a “continuous and entire presentness” through the liveness and perpetual disjunction of the applied paint whilst reflecting through their photographic sensibility “time passing and to come.”

In Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before (2008) Fried revisits his earlier arguments and terminology and applies them to photography. In particular he argues that Barthes’ description of photographic “Time,” as “the lacerating emphasis of the noeme (‘that-has-been’)” relates to his original notion of “antitheatricality,”

Time functions as something past, being historical, cannot be perceived by the photographer or indeed by anyone else in the present. It is a guarantor of antitheatricality that comes to a photograph, that becomes visible in it, only after the fact, après-coup, in order to deliver the hurt, the prick, the wound, to future viewers that Barthes fears and cherishes.¹⁶⁷

Fried’s description of “presentness”, where “one experiences as a kind of instantaneousness,... a single infinitely brief instant... long enough to see everything, to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it” may seem to encapsulate the qualities that Barthes felt towards the photograph. It is

¹ Written at a period where Modernism was giving way to Post-Modernism, Fried was grappling with terms that positioned Minimalism in relationship to Modernism. Fried saw Minimalism as a form of spectacle relating to theatre. Fried’s criticism of experience over the formal relations of art as exemplified in Abstract Expressionism inadvertently provided a theoretical framework for the conflicting phenomenological experiences within Minimalism and later Conceptual Art. Hal Foster ‘The Crux of Minimalism’, in The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996).
perhaps important to differentiate between notions of “presentness” and “presence”, although in order to attain a state of “presentness” it may be necessary to allude to a “presence”. Writing about how the Surrealists disrupted and disturbed the reading of photography through manipulations other than collage, Krauss identifies the “sense of presence” as “one of the most powerful of photography’s many illusions.”

Photography’s vaunted capture of a moment in time is the seizure and freezing of presence. It is the image of simultaneity, of the way that everything within a given space at a given moment is present to everything else; it is a declaration of the seamless integrity of the real. The photograph carries one continuous surface the trace or imprint of all that vision captures in one glance. The photographic image is not only a trophy of this reality, but a document of its unity as that-which-was-present-at-one-time.

Krauss describes how Dada montage artists of the 1920s such as Man Ray, André Kertész and André Breton used spacing and “combination printing” (double exposures) to disturb representations of reality and “simultaneous presence”. Krauss quotes John Heartfield “A photograph can, by the addition of an unimportant spot of color, become a photomontage, a work of art of a special kind.”

The photograph whilst capable of reflecting so uniquely a “sense of presence” or “was-present-at-one-time,” as identified in the photographs of The Woman with Big Sunglasses (Photograph 12–16) and the Sailor series (Photograph 3), can be argued as always belonging to a past tense, or an unsettling mixture of representing the past whilst conveying such a vitality they seem of the now and present yet still remaining resolutely dead. Referencing this conflation of time in the photograph, Barthes comments that the photograph represents “a strange stasis, the stasis of an arrest” whilst operating as a constant reminder of what is yet to come:

In the Photograph, Times immobilization assumes only an excessive, monstrous mode: Time is engorged... That the Photograph is ‘modern,’ mingled with our noisiest everyday life, does not keep it from having an enigmatic point of inactuality, a strange stasis, the stasis of an arrest.

Photography’s “tense”, as in past, present and future, is not received as a linear chronological ordering, rather it arrests and disturbs Time’s flow whilst at the same time reminding us of Time’s inevitability—all this in one picture frame. Not dissimilar to Fried’s separation of performance and painting, Barthes compares photography, where “something has posed” in front of the lens and “remained there forever” to cinema where something passes in a continual flow. Quoting Edmund
Husserl (1859-1938), the German philosopher who founded the first school of phenomenology, “Like the real world, the filmic world is sustained by the presumption that, as Husserl says ‘the experience will constantly continue to flow by in the same constitutive style’; but the photograph breaks the ‘constitutive style.’”

In a reference that seems to draw on Kracauer’s much earlier observation that “in inverse proportion to photographs, memory-images enlarge themselves into monograms of the remembered life,” Barthes describes how the photograph “blocks” and “counters” memory and states that the “Photograph is the aorist.” A term which means “a verb tense… expressing action or, in the indicative mood, past action, without further limitation or implication.” Further on Barthes insists, “The Photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed.” This statement summarises the range of conflictual feelings when looking at *The Woman with Sunglasses*, she seems to live so vitally in the photograph—whereby a strange confabulation begins to emerge and an entire falsification is construed from these photographs—so strong do they emit a sense of “being”. Barthes describes this perceived folding of Time within the photograph as a type of “madness”. Towards the end of *Camera Lucida* he writes:

> Here is where the madness is,… The Photograph then becomes a bizarre *medium*, a new form of hallucination: false on the level of perception, true on the level of time: a temporal hallucination, so to speak, a modest, *shared* hallucination (on the one hand “it is not there,” on the other “but it has indeed been”): a mad image, chafed by reality.

Society is concerned to tame the Photograph, to temper its madness which keeps threatening to explode in the face of whoever looks at it… The first consists of making Photography into art, for no art is mad… Photography can in fact be an art: when there is no longer madness in it, when its noeme is forgotten.

Whilst arguably photography can be seen to perpetuate a constant “astonishment”—where the revelation and discovery of the photographic subject ensures the photograph continues a “perpetual creation of itself.” The photograph also represents a “pseudo-presence,” despite its ability to bewitch and beguile by conveying a sense of “being” and vitality, as seen in *The Woman with Big Sunglasses* series. The found photograph essentially becomes emblematic of loss and of time.
passing, “a token of absence”. In this way the paint, applied as an interventionist tactic to puncture the platitudinous surface of the photograph, seems to defy and resist the potential deification of the past where falsifications and a maudlin nostalgia can all to easily arise when viewing old photographs. In his introduction to the ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’ (1940) Walter Benjamin quotes a poem by his friend Gerhard Scholem, illustrating Paul Klee’s painting *Angelus Novus* (1920), to describe the powerful exertion of the past whilst being forcibly propelled towards the future.*

> My wing is ready for flight,  
> I would like to turn back.  
> If I stayed everliving time,  
> I’d still have little luck.  
> —Gerhard Scholem, *Greetings from the Angelus*

*The full introduction by Benjamin: “There is a picture by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. It shows an angel who seems about to move away from something he stares at. His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face turned towards the past. Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is this storm.” Walter Benjamin, ‘On the Concept of History’ in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings 1938-1940*, ed., H. Eiland and M. W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 392.
Photograph 12 - 13. From the series The Woman with Big Sunglasses

*Found Polaroid, 2012 (9cm x 9cm), acrylic.*

*Here is the bride in all her synthetic glory, painted eyebrows, clapping her hands and looking tired.*

**Collecting Photographs**

Polaroids from the 1960s through to the 1970s represent a very particular era and are much sought after by online photographic dealers and collectors. Emulating a retro cool, the fashionable market for Polaroids often creates an online bidding war. In a series of 121 Polaroids mostly in colour and loosely contained in a hardback envelope, which I was fortunate to win, I can trace the life of one woman over a period from the mid 1960s through to the late 1970s. The set came from a Romanian dealer though it is difficult to pin down her ethnicity, other than Caucasian.

Her dress and the environments within the photographs are very westernized. As I shuffle through the Polaroids she moves from wearing 1960s style mini-dresses, to courting a Sophia Loren look with lush auburn hair and large frame sunglasses. In others she is wearing a hippy–style kaftan. There are nearly eighty Polaroids depicting this woman and often there is no one else in the photograph. No man ever appears. It is just she and whoever is behind the camera. Most of the Polaroids look like holiday snaps, taken at recognisable tourist destinations across Europe and the US. I consider that she [was] wealthy. Other photographs depict her opening presents, smiling and holding gifts up towards the camera, or standing by a specially laid out table, alone, in readiness for an event to begin.

It is hard to work out her age and I wonder how these photographs came to be separated from their owner. Given my fascination with this anonymous woman I attempt to give her a name, to make her seem less detached and separated. She is unreachable, what does it matter if I construct her a fiction, but each time it feels fraudulent and artificial. She has—has had her own life elsewhere as evidenced by the photographs in front of me. To make up a pretend history would contravene the reality presented by the photograph.

In two Polaroids she is sat on what looks like a hotel bed with a younger woman, suitcases packed in the background. I was surprised when I saw this photograph. There is a similarity between these women; same hair, features and deliberated dress style, with a possible twenty years age difference. Perhaps *she* is her mother though strangely the girl does not appear in any of the other photographs.
In one Polaroid, in the glare of a harsh hotel light, the woman is wearing a white knee length nightie holding a hairbrush as a microphone and striking a pose. In another photograph (and one assumes the next in sequence) wearing the same nightie, she leans right forward and seductively pouts close up into the camera lens. The bleached light and the inability of the Polaroid to focus at close range render half her face a white yellow orb. She is within touching distance of the camera but this is as close as I will ever get to her. Separated by over forty years, teasing the camera before I was even born.

It is in this photograph that I get a glimmer of her age and I realise that she is not as young as I had initially thought—late thirties perhaps. I do the sums, if my guess is right—she would now be in her eighties. It is more than likely that she is dead.
Photograph 14. From the series *The Woman with Big Sunglasses*

Painting over the found photograph
Smeared across the photograph the paint is a dirty intrusion. Everything about the material of paint is other and different to the chemical mirror of the photographic surface. In this instance as it spreads over the Polaroid, it is a disorderly medium, hard to control as the paint slides across the plastic veneer. The carrier of the medium, often a brush, leaves behind an impression of itself, exposing the very mechanics of making. The paint literally becomes an autograph and a very public statement of human intervention.

Look closely through the paint and you can see *her*. Long hair, burnt orange ribbed polo neck, the red plastic–clipped packing case, and tasselled crocheted blanket. She is smiling a wide-open smile.
Painting over the found photograph
The smooth and glossy Polaroid surface is particularly congenial to the application of paint, allowing paint to be applied, scraped off and reapplied numerous times over, though water and the constant rubbing motion eventually separates the photographic emulsion from the surface below. This limitation engenders a boldness forcing me to experiment more quickly than perhaps I would do normally. Painting on a photograph seems to invite caution resulting in a fine line between spoiling and creating that elicits a particular tension. Invariably however there are casualties. In these paintings I steer the paint with a brush, leaving behind a visible trace of movement, dynamism and a liveness. As the brush moves across the surface I can track its jagged energy. Later when the paint has hardened and becomes impenetrable, I can no longer rub the paint off, so I work over it, building up layers, this time favouring a translucent paint wash, which exposes and makes transparent every drag and stretch of the brush.

The struggle with the paint is explicit and continuous as I work across this series, with each photographic representation being slowly consumed by the paint. The only remaining and constant reference to the photographic vehicle is the white border. In each case the photographic content is negated and the applied paint takes on an abstract language. Only I know the visual content underneath and even then I very quickly lose the details. I am working with a wavering memory image, which feels more like sensing something as opposed to recalling a direct visual image. Whilst the layering of paint reveals the indentations of previous applications, which may offer hints as to the original focus of my intention, the subsequent layers become expressive of the symbiotic frustration and devotion I feel towards the photograph, felt more prominently in this particular series than others.
Why would I want to paint over this unknown woman removing her entirely from the worldview: her story, her vitality, vivaciousness and utter ordinariness, as told through the retro furnishings? The now desirable Meakin style teapot in her hand as she effects a pose, ready to pour the tea; the 1970s sideboard complete with a silver tray and glass cut decanter; the plump patterned cushions, which line a brown leatherette/leather sofa where she sits ready to eat—a plate perched on her lap with a lobster no less—the low level occasional table in front of her, matching the wood veneer sideboard, carrying all the condiments; bowls, cutlery and two bottles of beer—a special occasion perhaps—demanding a photograph to record these happy times. All this minutiae, the details that gave her definition and purpose gradually wiped out, erased, consumed whole by the unedifying tides of paint.
3.2. THE PRESENCE OF PAINT

In the essay ‘The Painter of Modern Life’ (1863) the French writer and poet Charles Baudelaire, called for artists to abandon “time honoured themes” of painting “mythology, ceremonial history, religious scenes” and to respond to the fast changing Parisian urban landscape. This call was in response to the wider industrial and social changes caused by the new emergent capitalist economy, which resulted in the rise of a leisured middle-class. It was also predicated on Baudelaire’s steadfast scepticism towards photography, which he saw as incapable of imaginative invention or communicating “the eternal and the immutable” arguing that painting was better placed to capture “the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent.”

If photography is allowed to deputize for art in some of art’s activities, it will not be long before it has supplanted or corrupted art altogether… Photography must, therefore, return to its true duty, which is that of handmaid of the arts and sciences… if once it be allowed to impinge on the sphere of the intangible and the imaginary, on anything that has value solely because man adds something to it from his soul, then woe betide us!

This delineation between photography and painting as being separate and distinct from each other steered a course for each form well into the mid-twentieth century, when artists began to question through paint and multi-media forms, a photographic way of seeing, in order to understand and convey the experience of contemporaneous living.

In a recent exhibition ‘The Painting of Modern Life, 1960’s to Now’ (2008) the curator Ralph Rugoff brought together artists who from the 1960s onwards sought to utilize the photograph within their work as a way of expressing the look of consumer society, which as described by Hal Foster in his review of the exhibition was “already heavily processed through photographic media.” Rugoff argues that 100 years after the publication of Baudelaire’s essay artists such as Andy Warhol, Gerhard Richter, Richard Artschwager, Vija Celmins and Malcolm Morely, who, recognizing photography as the predominant vehicle of representation within contemporary culture, challenged and re-presented the photograph through other forms, offering a “significantly updated version of the poet’s schema for

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contemporary history painting.” Though there are exceptions to the resultant division between photography and art as provoked by Baudelaire in the mid nineteenth century, for example, in the work of the Surrealist montage artists who, in the 1930s, used the photograph to question the status quo as represented and reinforced by the photograph. Rugoff sees a clear shift in the mid twentieth century when artists such as Richard Hamilton, Andy Warhol and Richter reacted against the elevation of painterly abstraction and the resultant formalism as espoused by the art historian Clement Greenberg, an argument that itself grew out of painting moving away from the ties of representation once photography became accepted as the predominant form for replicating reality (the beginnings of Modernism). In rejecting Abstract Expressionism and utilizing a proliferation of photographic media within their work these artists began to explore and challenge a photographic way of seeing, which had become the predominant visual reference of the time.

Hal Foster writes that photography and painting are associated with different sign systems, with photography “conventionally seen as indexical, a photochemical impression of the world, and (representational) painting as iconic, with a resemblance to the world that is less direct, more mediated by material, touch and tradition.” Rugoff suggests that by mixing-up “painterly and photographic codes to create complex and contradictory sets of pictorial signs” artists such as Warhol and Gertsch, and more recently Marcel Dumas, who paints from newspaper clippings and celebrity photographs, are able to unsettle the “codes and conventions” associated with each media. In Richter’s Woman with Umbrella (1964), a painting of Jackie Kennedy in mourning, with her hand covering her mouth and frozen in a moment of grief, the source is unknown but the language is recognisably of the media: blurred, indistinct and caught in action. At life size however (160cm x 95cm) the painting lacerates and unsettles in a way that viewing the image through daily print does not. Rugoff argues that these artists subvert the “infinite reproducibility of photography with the finite unique status of the art object” creating “a hybrid form” that upsets and disturbs notions of public and private, the original and mass production.” Drawing on the Modernist tradition within painting to represent an alternative way of expressing contemporary changing experiences, this practice of subverting methods associated with different mediums often results in revealing the limits and constructed nature surrounding the original way of seeing.
In the exhibition *Pittura Immedia* (1995)*, the curator Peter Weibel provides a survey of painting in the 1990s, looking specifically at the influence and absorption of the experience and language associated with technology and media within painting. Weibel centres his argument on three orders of painting, the unmediated, the mediated and the “Immediated”. In the first category he describes painting in the context of origin, in the sense that the blank canvas is “unmediated’, ‘devoid of context’, ‘pure’” where the artist becomes “the exclusive ego itself.”\(^{187}\) Weibel draws on the German meaning of ‘original as “ursprünglich” which translates as “close to the spring”, which he suggests represents the ideal of the painter, with the “promise of authenticity and conviction,” recognising that the history of art is invested in this idea of origin. He argues that Modernism, in the first half of the twentieth century was essentially concerned with exploring the notion of painting as a “spontaneous act without origin,”\(^{188}\) as exemplified in key movements such as Abstract Expressionism and the Surrealists explorations of automated writing. By comparison artists such as Warhol, Rauschenberg and Richter, mediated within their work, pre-existing visual imagery, such as advertising, posters, photography and print, as a way to directly challenge the rules of traditional history painting (“the origin”) with a view to change how we look at “the visual in modern society”. In particular he describes the Austrian artist Arnulf Rainer, who painted on top of his own pictures and photographs, as an artist whose actions eliminates and “negates origin,” even when they are his own marks,\(^{†}\) proposing that Rainer “did not liberate origin, but rather closed the door on it.”\(^{189}\) In the late 1960s through to the mid 1970s Rainer painted violent gestural painted marks over a series of photographs of his hands and face, which featured him grimacing and gesticulating (Appendix 1., Illustration 1, *Face Farce* series 1968-70). Drawing on an interest in expressionism, religious practices and the automatic writing and actions of the Surrealists, Rainer attempted to explore within his painted–over paintings and photographs what is viewed as “ugly, absurd or instinctual.” The resultant aggressive gestural painted marks can be seen as “primitive” connected to a

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† Rainer was not exhibited as part of the exhibition. Weibel writes, “Rainer was not really part of the Pittura/Immedia Exhibition, since his field of interests and viewpoint are only distantly related to the other pictorial positions.” ‘Painting in the nineties between mediated visuality and visuality in context’ in *Contemporary Painting in Context* (Denmark: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2009), 56.
style of childish “finger painting” and smearing. Rainer initially took the photographs in an automatic picture-booth before moving to a professional photographer. At the moment of exposure he would contort his face in extreme expressions, however he describes how the photograph often miss-timed not capturing the crucial moment of exertion or strain. He began painting over the photograph whilst experimenting with the psychotropic drug mescaline in the early 1970s, when he began “to perceive spots of colour and facial corrections on the photographic portraits which lay about.” He also became critical of the perceived “stiffness” in some of the photos, “despite the fact of being near nervous collapse during many of the photo-sessions,” explaining, “The documentation was insufficient. Therefore, I was prompted to paint over it, the dynamism and tension I did not find in the photos.”

In the 1990s Weibel suggests that painting moved to becoming “Immedia,” which refers to a form of “second-order painting”. Used in this way, Weibel describes “Immedia” as a form of knowing, “the painting has become a subject supposed to know. A knowing painting acknowledges both its own history and its technological surroundings.” Artists in this category absorb and reflect within their work “an already mediated, simulated reality, a make-shift reality.” In this expanded field, painting is free to draw on an historic canon of painting such as abstraction and merge it with the visual language of technological and media channels of communication. The exhibition Pittura/Immedia featured over eighty artists, providing a survey of the ways in which “painting” was transformed” when artists began to appropriate images and techniques from the media. The exhibition included an eclectic mix of artists, including the Austrian performance artist Günter Brus, who like Rainer experimented with actionism through performance in the 1960s, albeit an extreme version. Brus went on to produce a series of experimental artist’s books such as *Irrwisch* (The Imp 1971), exploring the Oedipal conflict and reworking over existing textual and visual material associated with art and history, combining grotesque sexual humour and shock as a way of acting out fantasies that were kathartic in intent. Weibel also included artists who in the 1980’s had experimented with direct appropriation, such as

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Richard Prince, and Martin Kippenberger. Working in a period where painting had been declared dead following the fall-out of high Modernism Kippenberger described how “it was impossible to produce anything original or authentic” and combined references to popular culture, art, architecture, music, politics, history and autobiography within his various art works.

3.2.1. THE DIGITAL VERSUS THE PHOTOGRAPHIC “RELIC”

Weibel’s tripartite categorisation used to trace the development of painting in response to the constantly changing visual stimulus within a global capitalist market system is a useful marker as to the shifts that have occurred over the past one hundred years. However since the early 2000s the sheer proliferation of digital technology, in particular digital photography and the ways of communicating through social media, the ordinary and everyday, has changed vastly. In this changing visual landscape the found vernacular photographic object stands out as an archaic form of representation, further reinforcing its associations with belonging to a bygone age. Reflecting this polarity between the digital sphere and the photographic “relic” the number of artists working with found photographs, since the initial investigations of this research, has expanded from a small number to form a new and definable field. Artists such as Joachim Schmid collect discarded photographs that have been deliberately ripped and damaged which he then pieces together and re-presents albeit in a fractured state. In 1990 Schmid posted an official looking notice in a public newspaper proclaiming the dangers of unwanted photographs and offering to recycle photographs through the fictitious ‘Institute for the Reprocessing of Used Photographs.’ Gaining worldwide publicity Schmid was sent several batches of discarded photographs including a series of studio portrait negatives that had been cut in half to deem them worthless. Schmid then spliced together different photographic halves, to remake 32 new black and white prints entitled Photogenetic Drafts, which, whilst looking like classic photographic studio portraits, were strangely distorted and misaligned. More recently Schmid has plundered the vast digital archives of online photographic sharing sites such as Flickr and Facebook to reclassify and re-present mundane and everyday photographic trivia into new categories of photographic genre, creating artists bookwork’s entitled Other People’s Photographs, Fridge Doors and Parking Lots. These digital appropriations reflect the banal and absurd aspects of contemporary living, which according to
Geoffrey Batchen convey a “startling conformity” and “numbing sameness” despite the global proliferation of digital media.\(^{197}\)

Whereas Schmid selects to re-present already damaged photographs the 2012 Deutsche Börse photography prize winner, John Stezaker very deliberately alters found photographs, postcards and film stills by slicing and cutting photographic portraits and then delicately repositioning either male and female, or very different faces, side by side to reproduce comic and surreal montages. Brett Rogers, the Director of the Photographers Gallery, London, specifically notes how in a digital age Stezaker does not use “Photoshop” to manipulate the image preferring to score the photograph by hand, which she describes represents a form of “craftsmanship,” implicating therefore that digital methods of manipulation do not hold the same status as craft making.\(^{198}\) In a similar way the artist Claire Pestaille, re-crafts old Hollywood photographs of film stars and models to explore issues of female beauty and fashion. By cutting up and reassembling found photographs Pestaille creates fractured patterns and kaleidoscope-type prisms from the original photographs. These highly patterned objects further heighten the nostalgic sense of beauty associated with these old pictures by transforming them into mesmerising and decorative artworks.\(^{199}\)

The attempts to fracture the found photograph through re-assemblage and distortion serve to heighten the otherness of this photographic form. As this research has revealed the found photograph provokes a sense of nostalgia about a lost past, which arguably becomes more pronounced in the face of the pulsating, ever changing and infinite digital sphere. The fascination with the found photograph is that it seems other to now—it has become an aesthetic object as observed by Sontag through time passing. Removed from its original function, as a domestic memorandum, the found photograph when transplanted into the sphere of art becomes celebrated for what it is—an aestheticised “relic” and an art object. Perhaps exemplifying the trend to decorate and transform the found photograph into a beautiful art object is the work of artist Maurizio Anzeri. A collector of found photographs and postcard portraits from the 1930s and 1940s Anzeri embroiders abstract designs over the photographic faces, creating intricate patterns focusing on a particular facial feature, such as an eye or a mouth. Whilst obscuring the identity of the photographic subjects the results are both hypnotically beautiful and psychologically unsettling.\(^{200}\) The embroidered lines evoke tribal facial masks and decorative sado-masochistic bondage headgear, while the tensile thread seems to constrict and muffle speech in an attempt to silence the past
perhaps. Anzeri claims that these found photographs have a different, softer quality than photographs of today.

Photographs from the 40s and 50s have a totally different quality from photos we’re used to today. We don’t recognise them as photographs now, they really look like watercolours or drawings. The images I use are anonymous, I find them everywhere; I’m really into flea markets and car boot sales, when you enter you have no idea what you’re going to encounter. 201

Anzeri’s observation alludes to the distance between the found and now aged photographic object and the present. Faded and turning to sepia the photographs have lost their original impact, they have become detached from reality—they are not photographs but pictures. Anzeri’s additional embroidered patterns elevate them from their obscure “flat deaths” further exaggerating and making explicit their aesthetic qualities by turning them into three-dimensional decorative art objects (Appendix 1, Illustration 7). 202

Belonging to another pre-digital analogue time, the found photograph, both as an object and as a subject, as seen within my own practice when reprinted digitally (Photograph 7, Boy) becomes a potent reminder of loss (death) and of being part of a continuum of history, as opposed to being of the moment (“For death must be somewhere in society”203). This sense of loss, of representing another time and place distant from now, and the tendency for the found photograph within the gallery environment to be held up as a beautiful and aesthetic object is potentially problematic, further perpetuating the myth that the past was an altogether better place than the present.

3.2.2. PAINTING THE PHOTOGRAPHIC

Whilst I recognise Weibel’s observation concerning the post-modern condition reflected within painting from the 1990s onwards, where history and styles conflate to reflect back the noise and immediacy of contemporary life, for many artists however, who utilise the paint medium within their work, the dominance of the photographic form continues to be a central theme for exploring the boundaries of visual representation through paint. The German artist Johannes Kahrs,* whose paintings are

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photorealist in style, replicates through the paint the blur, close cropping and a casual subject matter more often associated with the photograph. Kahrs states:

For me the photographic image becomes more physical more personal, when it is translated into a painting. It may be more clear in a way as well. But the reality of painting is not the reality of daily life. The presence of painting is about a different reality. Photographs never have this kind of attraction, this fascinating quality for me. They remain documents of some kind of reality, which I then forget again.\textsuperscript{204}

Kahrs takes images from popular media, focusing on one particular area or close up. He then blends the paint to the point where the brushstrokes become almost imperceptible, but these paintings are not like the highly photo realist paintings of the American painter Chuck Close, rather they replicate the fuzzy movement of the blurred photograph, caught on screen, with smudges of heightened Technicolor (Appendix 1, Illustration 3. *Silent Depression*, 1999). Kahrs further extends the photographic illusion by exhibiting the paintings behind glass, hiding the canvas-textured surface. In this way Kahrs switches the surface presentation of paint and photograph around, reflecting a highly polished and flattened painting that mimics the type of fleeting photographic image we see on a daily basis through various forms of media. By comparison the artist Theo Cuff, shortlisted for the John Moores Painting prize (2010), does not seek to hide the paint medium. Painting from personal photographs his work borders on the abstract whilst still conveying a photographic sensibility by deploying methods of layering and erasure, using the paint to blot out a painted head or an undisclosed subject (Appendix 1, Illustration 4. *Untitled*). Whilst Cuff is effectively painting over a painting, the methods of concealment and covering over through the paint what is underneath, is perhaps similar to my painted over photographs. As described in the accompanying writings my work treads a fine line between concealment and denial (with the latter more closely aligned to erasure), which as a response to the photographic subject is not always fully resolved. This method of erasure and reworking over existing material is a predominant theme in the artists’ works that I admire. Recognising that the contemporary visual field is never singular or plain there is a constant visual noise and commentary, with multiple voices and histories arguing and vying for attention. Amongst this constant visual stimulation and bombardment of ever changing imagery within the contemporary
environment, painting over the found photograph becomes an apt visual analogy for commenting on what has passed and how this is mediated in the present.

Featured in the exhibition ‘The Painting of Modern Life, 1960’s to Now’ the artist Gerhard Richter has, over the last fifty years of his painting career, challenged and explored the boundaries between painting and photography, questioning the claims to illusion and certainty within both mediums. Whether deploying photographic ways of seeing through his paintings as in his photorealist paintings *(Woman with Umbrella)* or bringing paint in direct contact with photographs as seen in his “overpainted” series, Richter is primarily concerned with questioning through paint media the ubiquity of the photograph and how it has effected and influenced perception. Utilising both journalistic and advertising imagery and personal family photographs Richter has amassed a huge archive of historical photographic images, which he brings together in a body of work entitled *Atlas*. Begun in the early 1960s this vast archive documents and situates photographs depicting the mundane, the pornographic, the personal and the horrific side by side, presented as a huge tome of photographic history.\(^{205}\) Writing early in his career (1964–1965) Richter reflects on his preoccupation with photography, “For a time I worked as a photographic laboratory assistant: the masses of photographs that passed through the bath of developer every day may well have caused a lasting trauma.”\(^{206}\) The art critic and historian Hal Foster reflects in his essay ‘Semblance According to Gerhard Richter’ (2009) how it was the “sheer proliferation” of photographs and the “pervasive transformation of appearance” as the images were processed through the developer that had such a lasting impact on Richter.\(^{207}\) The writer Benjamin Buchloh suggests that Richter’s fascination with photography, in particular the interface between the historical and personal is perhaps “closer” to that of the German writer Seigfried Kracauer, quoting a key line from his 1927 essay, where Kracauer observes “the world itself has taken on a photographic face.”\(^{208}\)

**3.2.3. AUTOGRAPHIC INTEVENTIONS ON THE PHOTOGRAPH**

In an interview with Jonas Storsve in 1991, Richter questioned what reality might mean, suggesting that rather than photography claiming to pertain to the real, it might be better expressed through painting.
Photography has almost no reality; it is almost a hundred per cent picture. And painting always has reality: you can touch the paint; it has presence; but it always yields a picture – no matter whether good or bad.\textsuperscript{209}

Later in response to questions concerning his “overpainted” photographs Richter refers to painting and photography as having “two realities.”\textsuperscript{210} By cross-referencing the codes belonging to each medium Richter questions the representational qualities and presence of each medium. Reflecting on a much earlier interview between Richter and Dorothea Dietrich in 1985, the German writer Uwe M. Schneede describes the tensions Richter is searching for in his “overpainted” photographs as “two quite distinct linguistic and pictorial planes.”\textsuperscript{211} In his essay ‘Reality, the Photograph, the Paint, and the Picture’ Schneede describes Richter’s method of using a Doctor blade to smear paint across the photographic surface to produce his “overpainted” photographs:

The paint remains on a plane at the front of the picture (as if on the glass), it is fragmented, has something vehement, even fleeting about it, disturbs the image, signals elemental doubts about the order of photographic reality.\textsuperscript{212}

Certainly the paint used within the “overpainted” photographs creates a visual and visceral disjuncture lying on top of the photograph (Appendix 1, Illustration 5. \textit{Firenze 2000} series). The paint is applied thickly like a lubricant and oozes and smears across the photographic surface. Even though the application is through an automated method, the paint alludes to an organic human presence compared to the flat representational formality of the photograph. In her essay ‘Illusionism in Painting and the \textit{Punctum} of Photography’ the writer Johannes Meinhardt writes how Gerhard Richter has a “well-founded distrust of reality” as applied to both painting and photography. Meinhardt applies Barthes description of the “\textit{punctum}” to Richter’s over-painted photographs to describe how the addition of paint frees the photographic image from its \textit{studium}:

…it is thrust back into its speechless and mysterious, even frightening existence. In this empty space freed from \textit{studium}, something else is able to surface that lends the photo a ghostly potency: the \textit{punctum}…\textsuperscript{213}

Further on Meinhardt suggests that Richter’s painterly interventions expose the certainty of the photograph stating that:

Painting is capable of piercing full of holes the certainty, the dumb positivity and muteness of what is depicted, what has occurred, with the negativity of
reflection... His [Richter’s] goal is precisely to intensify and expose this essential speechlessness, to make a burning issue of it.214

Whilst recognising the photograph’s “muteness” and silence Meinhardt claims that Richter’s automatic painted smears challenges the photographs claim on reality by intensifying the “essential speechlessness” inherent within the photograph. This position directly counters how I see the paint as fixing the photograph down and bringing a level of stability and certainty in the face of the uncertain, fluctuating meaning and temporal plane of the found photograph. The differences between these two positions may lie in the use of the found photograph, which as described has no certainty, other than it represents an event that happened sometime in the past. As argued, the distance accorded to the found photograph transforms the photograph into an aesthetic object acknowledged for the beauty and sense of loss. In his “overpainted” photographs Richter uses discarded family photographs, old holiday snaps and blurred family photographs that did not make the final edit of his semi private-public family photo album. These photographs are classified as failures and rejects, with little consequence should they become destroyed or transformed. Whilst the applied paint on these photographs is still perceived as alien, the effect is very different to painting onto found photographs, which as highlighted raises uncomfortable questions as to ownership and identity.

Emerging in the 1970s the artist Susan Hiller explores within her work themes of collecting, cataloguing, representing, and transforming cultural objects and experiences as a means of understanding the relationship between the unconscious mind and reality. In the 1980s Hiller utilised a form of calligraphy and automatic writing to mark over a series of photo booth photographs of herself (Appendix 1, Illustration 2. Midnight Waterloo 1987), which she then re-photographed and reprinted at a larger scale. Hiller’s work explores dream states and the subconscious and unconscious, at times moving into areas of clairvoyancy and spiritualism, themes that Hiller continues to examine within her current practice, as seen in her recent exhibition An Ongoing Investigation (2011).215 The series title for the written over photographs Midnight, alludes to “a moment between wakefulness and sleep, one day and the next, one world and another.”216 In describing the Midnight series, Hiller explains,
The idea was to take the inside and put it on the outside, in that this mysterious ‘calligraphy’ would be a veil between the viewer and the representation of face, of a woman’s face... You have to understand, the images start off as tiny miniatures, and then I do this writing, as I call it. It’s actually not writing, but it amounts to the same thing.  

Much of Hiller’s work explores the relationship between the rational and irrational, and private and internal experiences as a way of examining how these states of consciousness inform our understanding of reality. She refers to the Greek understanding of writing and drawing as one word, using the term “crypto-linguistic” to describe what “poses or masquerades as language.” Both Rainer’s painted gashes and gestural marks over his photographic face and Hiller’s illegible writings set against the technically polished surface of the miniature photograph are more closely aligned to scribble and scrawl rather than more formal language. These graphic marks provide a symbolic message concerning erasure, impulse and the internal—expressions which cannot be expressed through the photograph alone.

In a similar way to Hiller’s textual interventions, the contemporary British artist Dryden Goodwin uses graphic line to deliberately and meticulously scratch the surface of photographs he takes of strangers passing through London at night. Dryden selects crowded streets and stations to reflect the detached experience of living in a vast metropolitan capital. Absorbed in various states of contemplation the photographic subjects are not aware of being observed. Dryden uses the point of a compass to trace an intricate web of lines across each of their faces. The results _Cradle_ (2002) reveal a strange mix of voyeurism, familiarity and intimacy, and far from being violent, represent a way of connecting with the unknown (Appendix 1, Illustration 6). It is both the anonymity of the photographic subjects and Dryden’s need to connect to these strangers by scoring over their faces that I find fascinating, revealing a need to touch and reach out over the photographic void. It is perhaps telling that Dryden deploys the medium of photography to express this distance and disconnect between fellow travellers and then uses a hand tool through which to find a way to connect.

Whilst artists such as Hiller and Goodwin are using other autographic mediums, as opposed to paint, to transform the meaning and add further layer’s to the photograph, arguably however, the impulse is the same, to convey a level of human experience that the photograph seems incapable of communicating. Other artists such as Anzeri and Pestaille deploy methods of decoration within their work to transform
and elevate the found photograph from its relative obscurity, in doing so they create beautiful decorative objects that perhaps further reinforce the beautification and aestheticisation of a photographic form that is now seen as distant and other in comparison to the present. It is interesting to reflect that the majority of cited artists use the photograph to depict and represent human identity – reinforcing the notion that the portrait photograph has gained a visual supremacy for providing an immediate and instantaneous portrayal of an individual. By comparison Richter’s “overpaintings”, which utilize discarded family photographs, where the subject matter is deemed unimportant, becomes a commentary about the “reality” and difference of the two mediums.

In my work the application of paint is not arbitrary, it is specifically targeted, a response to loss and the lost subject. My preference for enamel paint, its thickness and globularity, is certainly not decorative. It is alien and different, it is not intended to beautify. The found vernacular photograph as argued is a very particular genre, a form that magnifies a sense of distance, detachment and loss. In the face of these exaggerated qualities the very materiality and certainty of the paint provides a fixing, a foothold onto which meaning can be stabilized. Paint may belong to a category of representation that has become more commonly associated with illusion and symbolism, but against the photographic uncertainty and unknowability of the found photograph it conveys intentionality and direction. Reflecting on the different abilities of drawn media and photography to direct the message and viewpoint, Barthes argues in *Image-Music-Text* (1977) pre-dating *Camera Lucida* that:

> [T]he operation of the drawing (the coding) immediately necessitates a certain division between the significant and the insignificant: the drawing does not reproduce everything (often it reproduces very little), without it ceasing, however, to be a strong message; whereas the photograph, although it can choose its subject, its point of view and its angle, cannot intervene within.

Whilst focusing and fixing the viewpoint, the paint as a substance reveals a human purpose and energy through its application. The paint might be hard, inert and dead—yet it evokes a liveness and viscerality in contrast to the surface of the photograph. Where the photograph is flat, impenetrable and unyielding, the paint has a form that suggests movement and intention. Writing about the twentieth century painter Cy Twombly, whose work explores the relationship between line, text and painting, Barthes describes the distinct qualities of drawing:
The line, however supple, light or uncertain it may be, always refers to a force, to a direction; it is an *energon*, a labor which reveals—which makes legible—the trace of its pulsion and its expenditure. The line is visible action.

Similarly Elkins in *What Painting Is* (1999) writes how the “paint records the most delicate gesture and the most tense.” By comparison, the “platitudinous” surface of the photograph renders the photographic subject speechless, in a permanent state of anaesthesia. The “*energon*” of the autographic painted mark challenges this sleepiness, drags the photograph out of domesticity and gives it another purpose, inviting a new way of looking. Elkins notes how paint offers an insight into the perspective and direction of the author but also that paint has its own physicality as a substance and material:

> [O]rdinarily... [being] a window onto something else, a transparent thing that shimmers in our awareness as we look *through* it to see what the painter has depicted: but it is also a sludge, a hard scab clinging to the canvas.

When on the photograph the paint becomes a “scab,” it is artificial, alien and abhorrent, it marks and negates the photograph but in doing so it sharpens and intensifies the process of looking, pulling the photograph out of its silent reverie of being an old and lost photograph.

In his autobiography *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1975), which is punctuated by photographs, drawings and diary notations, Barthes attempts to write about the process of writing, memory and discourse. In grasping to describe the space of writing and the imaginary he refers to an eighteenth century anatomical drawing of a body, detailing the arteries and veins and accompanied by the caption:

> To write the body.  
> Neither the skin, nor the muscles, nor the bones,  
> nor the nerves, but the rest: an awkward, fibrous, shaggy ravelled thing, a clowns coat.

This notion of an empty vessel, “a clowns coat,” devoid of ego of substance is perhaps an apt descriptor for the photograph—it is connected to the real “the photograph always leads back to the corpus I need, back to the body I see” but it has not touched or had contact with the body, in the way the Turin Shroud has—it is a pseudo reality and a shadow. The found photograph further exaggerates this remove from the physical body or the paintbrush. The photograph does not function as a remembrance of past events, the people are anonymous—I have no connection with
them. In this way the found photograph is an empty shell, an echo of something that has gone; it has become the “clowns coat.” It is a memoriam of loss. The addition of paint in marked comparison to the mirrored window plane offered by the photograph has a viscerality and form, it both represents and is connected to an ego—the author, and in this way it is always connected to the body.

In bringing together a collective of artists, including Richter, in an exhibition that examines the merging and assumed disparities between the two mediums, Rugoff recognizes how the conflation of the painting and photography, present a “hybrid form” that upsets our understanding of time. Whilst the photograph is “removed” or takes on a “disembodied character” the painting represents a “present-tense”. He suggests that the commingling of conventions, between photography and painting, results in a sense of the “uncanny” as used by Freud and explains, “uncanniness can be understood as the effect produced by a familiar object that has been rendered suspect or inexplicably strange, and so provokes an anxious confusion about its status.”

Treated in this way a photographic way of seeing represented directly through painting, or by painting over, the photograph becomes “absurd” because “it has been translated into a medium where its indexical status and corollary ‘truthfulness’” has become mixed with the “conventions of another compelling sign system.” He cites the methods of the Surrealists as being champions of the “uncanny”, who took everyday representations of reality including photography and realist painting to “defamiliarise” and upset the familiar and known. This method of disruption, to cause unease and discomfort, is a longstanding strategy used by many artists to question and dismantle what is taken as the social norm in order to expose the fragile construction of such conventions. An approach which links back to André Breton’s use of black humour to subvert the status quo. It is in this tradition of defamiliarisation, upsetting etiquettes and codes supplanted on a particular order of photography, where my practice resides. In this way the application of paint onto the found photograph is used to awaken and puncture the stifling silence and conformity of the found vernacular photograph whilst mocking the cloying nostalgia; saying what is deemed as unsayable and finally, perhaps, liberating the photograph from the unreal expectations that I and others laud upon it.
Photograph 17.

Found Polaroid, 2012 (9cm x 9cm), acrylic.

Uniformed Man, from the Polaroid collection.

A man in a uniform, wearing a peaked hat walks towards the camera in what looks like a busy American street. He looks official, a police officer maybe, or a traffic warden? But the photograph is underexposed and the man becomes a looming shadow in the foreground. His hulking form, merges into a brown, magenta soup of buildings and street furniture. He does not look happy; his body language is angry and he is gesticulating at the camera, or the photographer, or perhaps a person close by.

Painting over the found photograph

The applied paint is fragmentary and much of the photograph remains visible beneath. Painted swiftly, and loosely coloured in with watery black/grey paint, the crude outline vaguely resembles a human form, a blunted cartoon shadow emerging from the photographic surface. Only the outline of the head is drawn in one unsteady painted line, leaving a white void that provides a skeletal frame, past the policeman’s shoulder, ear and cap, and through to the whiteness of the sky and the void behind.

Looking at the two photographs from the Polaroid series (Uniformed Man and Photograph 4, Soldier) I recognise Barthes’ exasperation as he describes “for anyone who holds a photograph in his hand, here is a fundamental belief, an ‘ur-doxa’ nothing can undo, unless you prove to me that this image is not a photograph.” I consider how the paint threatens to negate and “undo” the photographic image, although in the Polaroid series this threat is never fully actioned. Instead the application of paint creates a tensive line between revelation—a process whereby the paint lifts the photograph out of its bland predictability, inviting a closer look at what otherwise might have been dismissed and glanced over—and obliteration, or annihilation, as seen in The Woman with Big Sunglasses where the paint smoothers and envelops the photograph in its entirety so the photograph finally becomes undone.
I am looking at a Polaroid of a young toddler / baby lying front down on a blanket, the body lays prostrate all most full length across the centre of the photograph. The white blanket or cloth that he/she is laying on forms a large bleached out square against a dark background. There is a small plastic yellow cross-shaped toy in the bottom right hand corner, the only presence of primary colour in the whole picture and which contrasts against the white mat and the pale flesh of the child’s body.

**Painting over the found photograph**

I went through many versions of painting over the original Polaroid. First, painting out only the body, then following the contours of the mat and finally experimenting with painting over the photograph entirely. I ended up with only a black circular dot on his face. In a formal sense the small black circle has a relationship with the yellow brick—two spatial elements on a flat plane. I tried making the circle very neat and synthetic like a cut out however this seemed to evoke a symbol of censorship relating to children and nakedness, which this work is not about. Instead I preferred the inaccurate wobbly lines of a hand drawn circle, including the painterly smudge of a previous experimentation.
Photograph 19.

Found photograph, 2012 (9cm x 9cm), acrylic.

*Untitled*, from the Polaroid collection.

In a black and white photograph from the 1950s five people sit around a table socializing. Bottles of beer are to hand and they have squeezed together to have their photograph taken. In the foreground the back of a vacant chair is pushed out, towards the camera, leaving a void, perhaps where the photographer sat moments before getting up to take the photograph.

Painting over the found photograph
The formal decision of where to paint is as much about wanting to reinvigorate the photograph than an aesthetic one. In this sense it represents a compulsion—to mark the photograph in some way, in an attempt to lift the photograph out of a perpetual flat obscurity.

I often find myself deploying the motif of the black dot to cover faces. Painting over the face obscures the identity of the photographic subjects and in doing so dilutes its ‘power’ and stranglehold on individual representation. It removes the “Look, See,” its “so-and-so,” which when viewing other peoples’ photographs can prompt a dismissal or disinterest of the subject. The paint however is an anomaly and demands a closer examination. In this Polaroid the dotted dots merge to form a rhythm and I add two extra to exaggerate the horizontal movement across the photograph as a contrast to the flocked wallpaper and vertical lines in the background.
3.3. PAINT AS PUNCTUM

In describing the paint as an alien imposition laying on top of the photographic surface, which by its very difference, startles the viewer and permanently changes the photographic reading, it is useful to consider Barthes’ description of a “punctum”, both as he describes it within the photograph in Camera Lucida and as an additional mark added to the surface of the photograph. Writing in Camera Lucida Barthes creates a division between “punctum”, which he describes as an “accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me),” and “studium”, which may provide a satisfactory explanation as to why the image does not “prick” or rouse his conscience or empathy. Barthes considers “The studium is that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste: I like/I don’t like. The studium is of the order of liking, not of loving; it mobilizes a half desire, a demivolition”. Barthes further elaborates that “culture (from which the studium derives) is a contract arrived at between creators and consumers. The studium is a kind of education (knowledge and civility, ‘politeness’) a tacit agreement between photograph and “Spectator” as to the correct reading of the message within the photograph. In his essay ‘The return of the real’ (1996) Hal Foster notes how Lacan writing in the early 1960s “was concerned to define the real in terms of trauma,” making a connection between Lacan’s term “tuché” (trauma) and Barthes’ description of the “punctum.”

This confusion about the location of the rupture, tuché, or punctum is a confusion of subject and world, inside and outside. It is an aspect of trauma: indeed, it may be this confusion that is traumatic.

Foster argues that the relationship between trauma and the real and the confusion between “subject and the world” and how the “inside and outside” is perhaps never more apparent than when looking at photographs. In relation to the photograph the reflected image shows us and convinces us that something has happened “I can never deny that the thing has been there” observes Barthes but the resounding silence of the found photograph cannot tell us any more than that. This elevation of the real above other forms of “verism” is so convincing and seductive in a photograph that I consider whether the trauma as described by Lacan is further compounded when the illusion of the real is severed or ruptured by the intervention of an autographic mark. In this regard the mark literally becomes the sign of a physical
trauma—the “punctum” serving to further compound the trauma of perceiving something that was real. Writing about the artist Gerhard Richter’s “over-painted” photographs the critic Johannes Meinhardt considers the addition of paint as “punctum” and in doing so comes close to describing the paralysing effect of nostalgia that I feel when I peer into the painted photographs of the young sailor (Photograph 20, Sailor Boy):

The punctum experience combines fear, pity, and sadness about a lost utopia. The past that is frozen and mortified in the photograph becomes a specter, a revenant, a zombie persisting in a death that will not end, in a continuous present, in a nunc stans that has already passed and died away forever. The punctum thus illustrates a contradiction that is difficult to bear: the presentation of the past, the intrusion into the present of something absolutely over and done with, therefore of something uncanny that cannot die away, that comes from without, frightening and seemingly unfamiliar, and that at the same time is only too familiar, something suppressed or disavowed in the viewer, a memory denied. The punctum thus derives its power from the collision of fear and desire, whose interconnection is altogether mysterious...

The punctum thus derives its power from the collision of fear and desire, whose interconnection is altogether mysterious...

In understanding what Barthes meant by “punctum” Batchen points out a shift in emphasis in the English translation of Camera Lucida which may alter Barthes “last thing about the punctum: whether or not it is triggered, it is an addition: it is what I add to the photograph and what is nonetheless already there”. Batchen notes, “in the French addition of Camera Lucida, Barthes calls punctum a “supplément” rather than simply an addition”, a shift of emphasis which Batchen suggests becomes “loaded” with meaning.

Consigning punctum to the logic of the supplement is to displace it from certainty, to put it in motion, to turn it in on itself. The most important element of the photograph is also, apparently, something supplemental, unnecessary, in addition to requirement. Like the referent, it is both there in the photograph and not there, both natural (a matter of indexical science) and cultural (brought to the image by a human observer) and therefore not quite either.

This redefinition of the term punctum helps to clarify Barthes’ observation that the punctum or message within the photograph continues to work long after looking at the photograph—“I may know better a photograph I remember than a photograph I am looking at, as if direct vision orientated its language wrongly.” Illustrating his claim Barthes refers to his post-reflection on the James Van der Zee family portrait
(1926) featured in Camera Lucida, “later on I realised that the real punctum was the necklace she was wearing; for (no doubt) it was this same necklace (a slender ribbon of gold) which I had seen worn by someone in my family.” Further he writes, “however immediate and incisive it was, the punctum could accommodate a certain latency” recognising that given time the imagination and memory would extend and strengthen meaning.

Ultimately—or at the limit—in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes. ‘The necessary condition for an image is sight,’ Janouch told Kafka; and Kafka smiled and replied: ‘We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes.’ The photograph must be silent.240

In this way the punctum or supplément becomes a projection onto the photograph. What emerges out of the photograph for one viewer may remain invisible to another. The reason why Barthes refused to reproduce the The Winter Garden Photograph in Camera Lucida was because “For You, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the ‘ordinary.’”241 This latent projection or supplement, which relies on remembrance to construct meaning, is however, slippery and uncertain. Unreliable memory and confabulation merge to supplement what never existed, as happened to Barthes himself when referencing the Van der Zee photograph. According to Margaret Olin in Photography Degree Zero the “slender ribbon of gold” necklace was in fact a string of pearls. Olin finds a similar gold necklace as described by Barthes in one of the family photographs reproduced in his autobiography Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes (1975), where the necklace is worn by Barthes’ Aunt Alice, who is seated in a similar “family constellation” as in the Van Der Zee photograph. Olin considers this transference of one image onto another as a form of displacement, revealing the memories ability “to embroider and change… Not just the memory of whatever incident or person the punctum reminds one of, but memory of the photograph, the spur to memory, can itself enact this displacement.”242 Olin goes on to suggest that this displacement of the punctum may indicate that the Winter Garden photograph itself never actually existed, a possibility which she argues that for the reader does not matter whether we see the photograph given that “the fictional truth of the unseen Winter Garden photograph is powerful enough to survive its possible nonexistence”.243 In summarising Olin states:
A reading of Camera Lucida suggests that the most significant indexical power of the photograph may consequently lie not in the relation between the photograph and its subject but in the relation between the photograph and its beholder, or user, in what I would like to call a ‘performative index,’ or an ‘index of indentification.’ Camera Lucida allows us to see it’s narrator use photography to satisfy his desire to possess or commune with his mother”.

Responding to Olin’s provocation Batchen considers that this slip of memory, or the conversion between seeing and the imaginary may be a common response when reading photographs. Referencing Benjamin’s account of the photograph of Dauthendey’s wife in Little History of Photography Batchen draws on Carolin Duttlinger’s argument that Benjamin’s story contains inaccuracies; it was not the first wife who committed suicide, rather the second wife. Whilst Benjamin supposedly knew the correct biographical details Batchen suggests that Benjamin “chooses, in the interests of positing a photographically induced delirium, not to remember exactly what he read there. The photograph therefore ends up inducing an emotive response to something other than itself.” In the case of Barthes’ mis-remembrance he questions whether Barthes “intended it to function only as a fictional archetype, the ur-photograph?” and if so he comments that “it’s a clever rhetorical strategy, whether real or imaginary, its place in his book is a space into which readers project their own punctum and enact their own primal relationship to a lost loved one.” Batchen then goes on to state “both Barthes and Benjamin seem to be willing to cross the line into fiction when it suits their purposes; that is, they lie when it allows them to describe a greater truth.” Such arguments emphasise how slippery meaning is when applied to the photograph. Barthes’ reference to punctum, which seems to offer a definitive interpretation for the photograph—it “rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow”— turns out to be entirely tied to the personal and subjective. Whilst being so certain in representing what has-been, the interpretation of photographs remains resolutely uncertain, a process of grappling in the dark. The supplement—what we bring to the photograph, whether in the form of memory, experience, stories, imagined or otherwise, alongside what we take away from the photograph again imagined or otherwise—magnifies the uncertain and scissoring relationship we have towards the photograph, which all to easily slips between fact and fiction, truth and fabrication.

In my collection of found photographs I have several images that arrive already containing some sort of graphic intervention, whether hand painted, written over with
terms of endearment or featuring a more obviously negative intervention representing defacement. Two images in particular stand out *Sailor Boy* (Photograph 20) and *Two Children* (Photograph 21). Once the graphic additions are noticed within these photographs, the reading and subsequent meaning becomes fixed, moving from uncertain conjecture to always considering the implications of the added mark. A similar response is articulated by the critic Mark Godfrey on viewing a scribbled over photograph reproduced by artist Tacita Dean in the small book *Floh* (2005). The title refers to ‘flea market’ in German and contains 163 found vernacular photographs dating from around the 1880s through to the 1970s. One of the reprinted photographs—a black and white photograph of 23 uniformed men and women standing in three rows to form a traditional group portrait—reveals two women in the back row whose faces have been scribbled over with blue pen. The pen has been pushed so hard that it has penetrated and scuffed the surface of the photograph. In his article ‘Photography Found and Lost: On Tacita Dean’s *Floh*’ (2005) the critic Mark Godfrey acknowledges that once he notices these marks the original inflection of the photograph becomes altered, “I cannot see the images in the same way again” and he questions whether these marks act like a “punctum.” “Could a punctum be something not in the photograph but something on it? Godfrey then quotes from *Camera Lucida*, where Barthes explains how a “punctum” operates; it “rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me.” Barthes asserts that once a “punctum” is recognised a “blind field is created (divined)” which creates a “whole life external” to the photographed subject. In analysing this particular photograph in *Floh*, Godfrey extends this notion of the “punctum” to not only the subjects within the photograph but the photograph as an object, which he describes “as a relic”. In the article he suggests that Dean displays this photograph to reflect, “the ritual uses of amateur photographs” arguing that the scribbled over image works as a pointer to “the irrational dimension of the everyday use of photography” and the “ritual uses of amateur photography”.

In arguing that some images sit outside language Morris reflects how the “scribble – perhaps closer to the shadow – is everything that falls short of articulation; where some kind of refusal or inability to speak, some fault in speech, is being registered.” In Dean’s selected found photograph however the scribble is understood as a very clear articulation of violence, a deliberate purposeful action
connected to an author who wanted to scratch and void the faces of two women resulting in a very public and symbolic obliteration and negation of identity.

Writing about the specific function of the “punctum” Barthes observes the ability of the photograph to anaesthetize its photographic subjects:

When we define the Photograph as a motionless image, this does not mean only that the figures it represents do not move; it means that they do not emerge, do not leave: they are anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies.²⁵²

In a similar way to Sontag’s use of the term, Barthes’ reference to “anesthetize” describes not only the essential speechlessness of the photographic subject but that the “platitudinous” photographic surface neutralizes and flattens their presence. They become nullified by the “Totality” of the photographic image. Later Barthes reflects, “With the Photograph, we enter into flat Death” an observation that draws together the morbidity surrounding the photograph “at the end of this first death, my own death is inscribed”²⁵³ with the impenetrable surface that by its own validation seems to distill its subjects. The anaesthetizing quality of the photograph combined with its evidential properties presents a confusing dichotomy—the photograph seems to represent and connect to a past reality yet remains resolutely distant, an emblem of death, an effect that becomes further exaggerated when viewing found photographs. The flatness and impenetrability of the photograph referred to by Barthes is both conceptual and physical. Barthes notes that however long and intensely he observes a photograph “it teaches [him] nothing”²⁵⁴ and quotes Maurice Blanchot the French writer and literary theorist (1907-2003) to explain the impenetrability of the photograph and always being an outsider to its content:

[F]rom the eye’s viewpoint, ‘the essence of the image is to be altogether outside, without intimacy, and yet more inaccessible and mysterious than the thought of the inner-most being; without signification, yet summoning up the depth of any possible meaning; unrevealed yet manifest, having that absence-as-presence which constitutes the lure and fascination of the Sirens.”²⁵⁵

Of course using the paint to “connect” is ultimately a futile gesture, it can never penetrate space and time, even when the photographic surface is physically broken and begins to peal away as it is want to do by the constant abrasion of paint and water—the paint always exists as a surface abrasion—permanently in opposition to the photographic fragments underneath. It can never truly penetrate the platitudinous surface, only through obliteration (even partially), utilizing its physical difference
against the sheer surface, can it shatter and disturb the reading of the photograph. As seen within both the Sailor Boy and Two Children photographs the original addition of graphic media serve to create a Barthesian “blind field,” puncturing the photographs neutrality and silence.

The paint as “punctum” startles the viewer. It is not expected. It is not a supplement in the mind of the viewer; it exists as a physical entity on the photographic surface. In this way the paint has a reality where the photograph has none. The paint fixes down Barthes’ sweeping glance and re-presents a more concrete, albeit unsettling narrative.
Photograph 20.

Sailor Boy, early 1950s (image destroyed)

The Sailor Boy is one of four similar photographs belonging to the Sailor series (Photograph 3). The photographs show the sailor as a young boy, in his mid to late teens. He is wearing the uniform of a Matelot and flanked either side by a woman and a man, both of whom, I presume, are his parents. They are standing in a garden and in the foreground are hollyhocks and sweet peas. The whole photograph has been crudely hand painted in 1950 pastel shades of yellow, pink, red, purples and blues. The mother’s dress is coloured a light sky blue. The paint has run and coagulated ever so slightly on meeting her retouched pink flesh. The effect creates a faint dirty outline at her cuffs and hem of her dress. Cheeks have been rouged and a vermillion red has been applied to all their lips, making the father—wearing high waisted trousers and a pin stripped jacket, with a pipe perched between his painted mouth—look ever so slightly comical. In the other non-painted black and white photographs that accompany this photograph, the camera lens retracts and the garden is revealed in all its self-sufficient post war glory, profligate with vegetable vines and well-tended flowerbeds.

Looking at this photograph the wave of nostalgia is a tangible almost physical force. It must have been taken at the height of summer and I feel like I am in a Lewis Carroll novel, peering into a present, where life is (was) happening elsewhere. The flood of nostalgia is without doubt compounded by the presence of the hand painted colour. The paint is too haphazard, too sloppy for it likely to be commercially coloured as was the fashion of the time. The lines are shaky, uneven and colours pool, overlap and bleed into one another, creating muddy edges. In some areas the paint is thin and transparent. The effect feels feminine and I wonder who added the colour—his mother, sister, girlfriend, or perhaps the sailor himself.

Photograph 21.

Two Children, late 1950s (image destroyed)

The photograph is a black and white image of a little boy, approximately two years old, standing beside his baby sister or brother who is seated in a high chair. The sex of the baby is hard to determine, she is dressed in a frilly white smock, however such was the fashion of the time that she could easily be a he. Nothing is untoward about this image and it seems utterly charming. The young boy is looking at someone to the right of the photographer, his mother perhaps, and the little baby is holding up her right hand as if to point or grab at something. It is at this point that I notice the drawn-on right hand. Almost imperceptible, someone has very carefully, with a light grey pencil, drawn a perfect rendition of a baby’s tiny hand. The greys have been smudged so to blend in with the tones of the photograph and a sharpened graphite line defines four perfect fingers and a thumb; they have even added little white fingernails. The drawing is so naturalistic that I reflect how the artist must have studied very carefully a small child’s hand in order to get the correct scale and angle. The date on the reverse of the photograph is 1958. I consider whether the necessity to draw on a hand was the result of the first wave of thalidomide use, which was introduced in 1957. Whatever the cause, someone felt the need to conceal the reality, to present instead an image of five-digit perfection.
3.4. DISTURBING THE ORIGINAL

Writing in the 1930s Walter Benjamin was concerned to position how the photograph, as a form of reproduction, could liberate and dismantle the cult of the art object. Central to this argument was his definition of “aura”, which in his essay ‘Little History of Photography’ (1931) he describes as, “A strange web of space and time: the unique appearance of a distance, no matter how close it may be.” Writing five years later, in the essay ‘Work of Art’, Benjamin elaborates further on these ideas relating “aura” to an understanding of history and artistic provenance.

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. This includes the changes which it may have suffered in physical condition over the years as well as the various changes in its ownership. The traces of the first can be revealed only by chemical or physical analyses which it is impossible to perform on a reproduction; changes of ownership are subject to a tradition which must be traced from the situation of the original.

In Walter Benjamin and Art (2005) the writer Andrew E. Benjamin argues that Benjamin’s definition of aura refers to the “structure of experience” and explains that the description of “a strange web of space and time” invokes “Kantian forms of intuition, the structuring, or formal, constraints on our sensory intuition”, which results in “a mode of experience that transcends our everyday ways of engaging with the world” similar to Kant’s description of the aesthetic experience.

The definition of the aura as the ‘unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be’, represents nothing more than a formulation of the cult value of the work of art in categories of spatiotemporal perception. Distance is the opposite of nearness. The essentially distant object is the unapproachable one. Inapproachability is, indeed, a primary quality of the cult image; true to its nature, the cult image remains distant, however close it may be.

According to writer and critic Michael W. Jennings in The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility (2008) this notion of “distance” which serves to create the “aura” can be described as a:

…psychological inapproachability–an authority–claimed for the work on the basis of its position within a tradition… If the artwork remains a fetish, a distanced and distancing object that exerts an irrational and incontrovertible power, it attains a cultural position that lends it a sacrosanct inviolability. It also remains in the hands of a privileged few…
These arguments concerning distance and the “psychological inapproachability” of an object can mostly be ascribed to the ritualistic uses surrounding the vernacular photograph. The “distancing object” might refer to Sontag’s description of the “aesthetic distance” caused by the passing of Time, which in turn becomes fetishized by deeming the photograph as a “special case,” different from other forms of representation and strengthened further by the tendency to invest onto the found photograph nostalgic and sentimental interpretations. In this instance perhaps the only difference from a precious art object is arguably the photograph’s ubiquity and its cheapness. Instead the vernacular photograph’s power is through the emotional bonds and ritualistic conventions that surround its usage.

Benjamin’s belief in the emancipatory power of new technology to release art from the confines of cultish adoration continues in the statement:

What withers in the age of the technological reproducibility of the work of art is the latter’s aura… It might be stated as a general formula that the technology of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition… [C]ult value does not give way without resistance. It falls back to a last entrenchment: the human countenance… It is no accident that the portrait is central to early photography. In the cult of remembrance of dead or absent loved ones, the cult value of the image finds its last refuge. In the fleeting expression of a human face, the aura beckons from early photographs for the last time.262

The resultant elevation and adoration of the photograph is the very opposite to how Benjamin saw the photograph as operating, free from the restrictive constraints of tradition as foisted upon the original art object, though in the latter statement he does acknowledge how the “aura” is transferred through the “cult of remembrance” when connected to the human face. Howard Caygill explains that for Benjamin the advancement of the photographic portrait marks a move from “cult to exhibition value”, arguing, “photography moves from evoking remembrance to bearing witness… providing evidence of historical events.”263 Benjamin cites the French photographer Eugène Atget (1857-1927) whose street and journalistic photographs herald a shift from photography primarily used for remembrance to a new type of photography that encourages active engagement, with both image and accompanying text:

With Atget, photographic records begin to be evidence in the historical trial [Prozess]. This constitutes their hidden political significance. They demand a specific kind of reception. Free-floating contemplation is no longer
Benjamin’s observation seems to separate out the photograph as document from the personal photograph, which is where Benjamin notes the “cult of remembrance” resides. Kracauer writing on Photography a few years earlier in 1927 similarly recognises the relationship between photography and memory:

In inverse proportion to photographs, memory-images enlarge themselves into monograms of the remembered life. The photograph is the sediment that has settled from the monogram, and from year to year its semiotic value decreases. The truth content of the original is left behind in its history; the photograph captures only the residuum that history has discharged.

Kracauer’s statement alludes to Sontag’s observation that time will eventually aestheticize the photograph, rendering it into an aesthetic object whilst pre-empting Brecht’s observation concerning the limitations of reflecting reality through the photograph. Benjamin’s politicized call for the photograph to release the art object from its cultish adoration did not come to fruition, instead the photograph has acquired its own mantle of reverence, recognizing that the notion of a sacred distance, which accords the art object a special power, is prevalent also in the photograph.

This sense of temporal distance, as described by Kracauer and Sontag writing at different ends of the twentieth century, is reinforced by deep-seated beliefs concerning identity and the self, which form to create the photographs own “psychological inapproachability.”

It would seem whilst societal values concerning artistic originality and the artists mark can be conceptually challenged, the dominance of the market and the escalating economic value only further serve to reinforce and elevate an artworks “aura”, indicting the artwork with a ritualistic and cultish deity and ensuring a continuing cycle of ever increasing (as evidenced by the art market) value. In this

* Hal Foster, writing in Archives in Modern Art (2002), refers to the wider political changes happening across Europe during the early twentieth century, which readily influenced Benjamin’s outlook. He argues that in Work of Art Benjamin “still had a vision of… potential construction—the Constructivist experiments in the Soviet Union—which would sweep away the fragments of the old bourgeois culture or reassemble them, radically, in a new proletarian culture.” This destructive/constructive approach is referred to as “active nihilism” in Caygill’s Walter Benjamin: the colour of experience (1998). Writing at a time in the 1930s when political ideologies were still in contestation, Foster notes that “What seemed imminent in his “The Author as Producer (1934) had become utopian only four years later.” Hal Foster, Archives of Modern Art, Cambridge, MIT Press: October, Vol. 99, Winter, 2002).
regard the market has supplanted religion and magic as the vestige through which to understand Benjamin’s notion of “aura” resulting in the continued elevation of the art object, whilst our relationship with the found photographic object reveals a series of ritualistic behaviours that behoolden the photograph with special qualities.

Utilising methods of appropriation within my research and then permanently altering the found photographs through the application of paint, raises questions as to ownership and the importance of the original object. These issues have concerned a number of artists including the British artist Tracey Emin, who referring to a collaboration between herself and Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010), the late French artist, described the difficulties of working over someone else’s work. Bourgeois had sent sixteen gouache paintings of male and female torsos to Emin for her to work over. Bourgeois’ original images were a fluid mix of paint and water, combining watery blues, blacks and reds. Some reveal large, incumbent pregnant bodies, others display erect penises, emblazoned with a deep rich colour. Emin admits that she stalled working on them for over a year, recognizing that they were “precious objects in their own right” and confessed that “I carried the images around the world with me from Australia to France, but I was too scared to touch them.” Emin eventually added text and drew small black figures that interacted with Bourgeois’ bodies. In one Too Much Love (2009-2010) a miniature woman, scrawled in black ink, crouches down to embrace a plum, aubergine coloured penis in an act of fellatio. In another A Sparrows Heart (2009-2010) Emin adds a black foetus, drawn in a thick painted line, which occupies Bourgeois’ round, flesh–coloured pregnant belly (Appendix 1, Illustration 8–9). Emin had to live with the pictures for over a year before she was able to intervene, allowing time to shift from the unknown into the known and familiar, softening the final act of intervention or feelings of trespass.

Similarly to Emin the British artists Jake and Dinos Chapman have, through appropriation and intervention tested and provoked the notion of the original in relation to art and authorship. In 2003 the artists extended their preoccupation and obsession with Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (1746–1828), and in what many art critics labelled the ultimate act of “transgression”, the artists painted clown faces directly onto a complete set of Goya’s The Disaster’s of War etchings. The altered prints were entitled “Insult to Injury” and were exhibited at Modern Art Oxford, as part of the exhibition The Rape of Creativity, 2003 (Appendix 1, Illustration 9). In the accompanying exhibition catalogue the curator Suzanne Cotter
draws on Walter Benjamin’s understanding of “aura” and notes how the Brothers’ graphic interventions on such a highly valued print edition upsets the,

…artistic aura and the mission of conservation so dear to the ideals of cultural heritage … once over the auratic precipice of Goya defiled, however, it is possible to believe that the Chapman Brothers’ interference heightens the scenes of cruelty, unspeakable brutality, hypocrisy and despair.\footnote{The provenance as stated in the auction catalogue indicated that it was copied from an original scene by Brueghel, circa 1618, Colin Gleadell. “Chapmans’ Marked-Up Old Master Brings $1.2 Million”, ARTnews, August, 16, 2011. Accessed June 28, 2012. http://www.artnews.com/2011/08/16/chapmans-marked-up-old-master-brings-1-2-million/}

In this context, Cotter seems to suggest that the Brothers intervention extends the meaning implicit in Goya’s original work. Intervening some 200 years after Goya felt compelled to respond to the brutalities of the Spanish civil war in the early part of the nineteenth century, the Chapman Brothers’ graphic commentary of comic leering clown faces painted onto the original victims’ heads invariably provides an insight into present preoccupations. The mocking clown faces and puppy dogs seem to refer to a grotesquerie of images reminiscent of schlock horror films, slasher movies and the kitsch scare rides at fai
grounds. These leering faces are at once ironic, signalling the cheap thrills so commonplace within contemporary popular culture. It could be read that the painterly commentary provided by the Chapman brothers is a moral one; the brutality of death so daringly recorded by Goya has now become a form of cheap pornography in our modern society. Other examples of the Brothers’ painterly interventions onto original artworks include adding goggle–eyed monsters and a women smoking a cigarette onto the painting The Crucifixion, a seventeenth entury painting by a follower of Pieter Brueghel the Younger (2010).\footnote{The provenance as stated in the auction catalogue indicated that it was copied from an original scene by Brueghel, circa 1618, Colin Gleadell. “Chapmans’ Marked-Up Old Master Brings $1.2 Million”, ARTnews, August, 16, 2011. Accessed June 28, 2012. http://www.artnews.com/2011/08/16/chapmans-marked-up-old-master-brings-1-2-million/} In another they add psychedelic rainbows and stars to a series of original watercolours by Adolph Hitler, adding the title If Hitler had been a Hippy How Happy Would We Be (2008). Their interventions disturb because they choose to mock and exploit the work of such a contentious historic figure, using their own artistic reputation to further elevate and make public the artwork. In response to painting over Hitler’s watercolours, they boldly reclaim authorship and ownership of the work, “It's not his work any more. It's our work.”

Jake and Dinos Chapman play into the cult of the artist, exploiting their own reputation as art celebrities and entering into a marketised cycle of adoration, their
painted marks held up as more valuable than the original original.” By playing into the cult of the artist the Brothers perpetuate and exemplify Benjamin’s early critique of the cult of the art object, it is perhaps not surprising that many critics see the brothers’ intervention and alteration of an original and limited set of prints, by such a historical significant and venerated artist such as Goya, as an ultimate act of transgression. The Chapman Brothers have become notorious for dealing with the traditional subjects associated with transgression within art. Neal Brown writing in the Rape of Creativity exhibition catalogue writes how Jake and Dinos Chapman “refute the idea of art as redemptive, playing instead on the ways in which art, meaning and value are caught up in a self perpetuating economy, one in which the artists also play an active part.”

The Chapman brothers are an interesting example of how attempts to transgress and challenge notions of originality are quickly absorbed back into the all-dominant art market. Through daring to defile an original historic artwork the market responds by applying a further monetary value to what is perceived as original marks made by the recognized artists. The recognition and endorsement lauded by the art market evinces the observation made by Clement Greenberg, the modernist art critic, in his essay ‘Avant-garde and Kitsch’ (1939) where he described the relationship between the avant-grade, an artistic elite who saw themselves outside society but who “remained attached” to society “by an umbilical cord of gold” through the art market. Greenberg recognized that the tenants of modernism, creating the new and overturning the past, relied on a surplus of capital, allowing a critical space for an intellectual cultural elite and resulting in radical new concepts quickly becoming absorbed into the mainstream.

The found photographs in my collection arrive as original objects, often with no negative, they exude a specialness because they are deemed authentic historical objects, complete with frayed edges, thumbprints, creases and folds, which the copy (through the scanner) does not and cannot contain. This materiality increases the photographic objects emotional value and consequently reinforces its “psychological inapproachability” which, as described by Jennings, is “an authority-claimed for the work on the basis of its position within a tradition.” The original photographs are digitally scanned providing the option to reproduce the photographic image over and

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* They initially acquired The Crucifixion in 2009 for €220,000. Following the brothers’ painterly intervention and the re-titling of the work as Oi Pieter, the piece was sold to a private collector for £750,000.
over again. Interestingly however, when painting over the original photograph and the digital copy, it is the digital print which induces more caution. As previously described, the original photograph, particularly when painting onto the shiny surface of the Polaroid, can handle numerous painting experiments allowing for the surface to be wiped clean until the right tension or combination of paint–to–photograph is found. The porous quality of the digital paper however is less forgiving, as is the expense of the digital paper. These factors narrow down the potential for conversations between paint and photograph. A significant loss, as the marks are an attempt to articulate my relationship towards the photographic subject, which then influences form and aesthetic decisions (see Mr Ranger Photograph 10, The Woman with Big Sunglasses Photograph 12 -16 and the Untitled Polaroid Photograph 19 as examples of this relationship).

In my collection the Polaroid exerts the most fascination as an original photographic object. It has a particular resonance, personifying an era and emanating a much sought after retro cool. With its square dimensions and faded colours it evokes a time when photographs were objects and not digital pixels. Such nostalgic associations have become tangible assets in terms of monetary value, as seen in the recent buyout of Instagram by Facebook, an online photo-sharing and social networking service, at an estimated one billion US dollars. A distinctive feature of Instagram is its square shape, evoking the era of the Polaroid SX-70 and the Kodak Instamatic 126 cartridge, whilst providing various filter options that replicate the image saturation and violet hues of yesterday, ensuring today’s photographic experiences reflect the desired authentication of age. Benjamin’s notion of “aura”, as a set of ritualistic behaviours continues in the present whether in the form of a slavish respect for objects that are accorded a monetary value or through notions of authenticity as evidenced by the cultural importance of historical archives and collecting, alongside the rising value of retrocool as seen in the recent buyout of Instagram.
Found photograph, 2012 (7.5cm x 5cm), acrylic

*Diane*, from *Some People*.

Proppped up on my laptop is a miniature two by three inch, black and white photographic portrait of a young woman. The photograph is from an American dealer with the date “1966-67” written on the back. The woman in the portrait is called “Diane.” In a feminine girlish script that runs diagonally across the entire reverse of the photograph, starting at the top left corner and finishing in the bottom right corner, Diane has written:

> “Cousin ‘Burt’, You want to know something? You are the most considerate boss ‘cuz’ in this cruel world. Honest! You’re always waiting for me no matter what. If Rudy + I ever give someone a ride home I hope it will always be you. Besides being considerate you’re good looking. Love Always, Diane”

Diane’s hair is groomed into a bouffant bob. I study the photograph and feel nothing other than a vague sense of detachment or disassociation. Unlike the *Sailor* series there is no Barthesian “that-has-been,” jolt of recognition, no startling revelatory “punctum”. Though I do note she has a strong neck.

I bring the photograph up to eye level. On a horizontal plane I can see the textured surface of the photographic paper. If I squint, graphic forms begin to merge into a black, white and grey blur. Turning the photograph upside down, bending it slightly, I see the paper’s fragility, scuffed and bruised at the edges. This level of scrutiny forces me to consider how easy it is to overlook the physicality of the print—seduced instead by the “weightless, transparent envelope” onto which any number of imaginings can be projected.

When scrutinising the photograph of his grandmother Kracauer writes, “If one were to look through a magnifying glass one could make out the grain, the millions of little dots that constitute the diva, the waves and the hotel.” Kracauer acknowledges however that it is the photographic subject that dominates and overrides any consideration of the material, arguing that: “The picture… does not refer to the dot matrix but to the living diva on the Lido. Time: the present.”
I turn to look at Diane once again. I notice there is the faint indentation of “Burt, Love Diane” in faded biro pressed into the bottom hand corner of the photographic portrait. This snippet, as a narrative adjunct, is interesting, but unlike the Boy photograph, where the fascination is immediate, Diane seems to warrant only the mildest of interest.

I shut my eyes “to make the image speak in silence”²⁷⁶ and to try and summon an alternative history for Diane, Cousin Burt and Rudy. My feelings towards the portrait shift, but I cannot resurrect the vital presence in the same way as the Boy or the Sailor photograph. Diane is compressed and flattened under the polished photographic surface. She is too far away. I put the photograph down and force myself to imagine her vitality. What were her preoccupations whilst writing that note to Uncle Burt—the exertion of pressure needed on the ballpoint pen to impress ink into the silky surface of the photograph, the indexical imprint of that moment still remaining half a century later.

I channel hard. I momentarily become a clairvoyant attempting to cross over the shimmering photographic divide. Such exertions and psychic dabblings prove to be futile, of course. I am a charlatan. Diane is pigment, blurred on paper. Diane is dead, what remains is all graphic noise and inference.
Photograph 23.

From *Some People* Artist Book III, 2012 (27cm x 23cm) crayon, pen

I tried to explain to a colleague the range of conflicted feelings I experience at the very moment I bear down on the original photograph with the graphic implement in hand. Whilst I do not believe in forms of photographic voodoo or karmic payback—I am at that moment, as I hover above the photograph, struck by the feeling that what I am about to do is sacrilege, so deep runs the opposition against defacing imagery and print in our society.

**Painting over the found photograph**

One painted strike and the quiet photographic perfection is destroyed, the messy unstable paint bleeds outwards, uncontained over the surface gloss. The application of paint finally puts to rest the photographic in-memoriam and brings the now non-photograph (‘picture’) firmly into the present.

**Bookworks**

The bookwork’s entitled *Some People* (each contain approximately 128 pages, minus the ones I have ripped out) feature professional head and shoulder found photographic portraits. Operating as a collective photograph album these books bring together arbitrary and unconnected portraits of people, onto which I scribble over each page. Unlike some of the stand-alone original and printed photographs where the paint application has an entirety—readily distinguishing the photographs identity—on these closed pages the applied marks have a more graphic and open line, allowing for the individuals identity to be retained.
What is the essence of a pair of pants (if it has such a thing)? Certainly not that crisp and well-pressed object to be found on department-store racks; rather, that clump of fabric on the floor, negligently dropped there when the boy stepped out of them, careless, lazy, indifferent. The essence of an object has some relation with its destruction: not necessarily what remains after it has been used up, but what is thrown away as being of no use.\(^7\)

CONCLUSION: PAINTING OVER THE FOUND PHOTOGRAPH – VIOLATION OR SALVATION

In *Art after Appropriation*, John Welchman cites a “Western culture of appropriation” which was founded on a process of “material repossession: the annexation and absorption of other European and Mediterranean cultures by the Roman Empire from the second century BC to the third century AD.” Welchman uses the terms, “Fragmentation”, “dismemberment” and “plunder” to describe these processes of acquirement. Even when advocated by supporters of appropriation the language is often negative in form. For instance in *Photography at the Dock (1991)* the writer and historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau uses the term “pillaging” to describe how appropriation artists accessed mass media images. This description itself denotes a negative act as opposed to a creative act, with the word “pillage” being defined as “depredate, desecrate, desolate, despoil, devastate” These ‘D’ words either represent a point of violation or are antagonistic—anti or against a (presumed) pre-existing standard. Terms not dissimilar to those used to describe the actions of an ICONOCLAST known as “a breaker or destroyer of images, especially those set up for religious veneration”, or “a person who attacks cherished beliefs, traditional institutions, etc., as being based on error or superstition.” The photographer John Goto in *Loss of Face; Iconoclasts, Zealots and Vandals* Illustration 8., (Tate Britain October 2002 – March 2003) documented the remains of slashed and damaged faces on fifteenth century rood screens, recording violent slashes, gouged out eyes and “banged” up mouths. These acts perpetrated by sixteenth century Protestant Reformists were a very symbolic and public attack on a belief system, with the damaged screens left in situ to act as a visual warning against the purported dangers of idolatry. In *The Commissar Vanishes: The Falsification of Photographs in Stalin’s Russia* (1997) the writer and collector David King documented how Stalin’s censors publically doctored photographs by either erasing or cutting out enemies or suspected dissenters of Stalin. These marked photographs not only left behind a very public graphic sign of absence and erasure, they also signalled literal individual negation with many of the absentee photographic subjects arrested and subsequently killed.

Working into this long history where marking representations of the human is assumed as negative in intention, the research was motivated to understand the conceptual and visual implications of painting onto the found photograph, a medium not normally seen as an art form and more commonly associated with the domestic
sphere. Using my own practice as a study, my extensive collection of found photographs offers a small window into the noisiness and continuum of human life as represented by the photograph. Through opening this small window and bringing into view the intimate practices of working in the studio, the research provides a different perspective. In doing so it puts forward several new findings that contribute to a body of knowledge that seeks to understand the on-going relationship between photograph and paint. Importantly the studio provided an intermediary space where theory and conceptual statements were tested out through the visual practice, allowing for a play of voices to evolve that moved between action, the reflexive and analytical. This interplay relied on a level of engagement with the imagery that constantly questioned the seductive slide into nostalgia and sentiment, findings that were supported by the observational writings which reveal how easy it is to romanticise the past and the passing of time when viewing found photographs. Despite providing a critical framework to explain these tendencies the research makes explicit the constant struggle between idolisation for the lost subject (as seen in The Woman with Big Sunglasses) and a frustration at the inadequacy of these constructions, with the found photograph remaining irrefutably and stubbornly silent. It is in this fraught, contradictory and messy space, where my own feelings towards the photograph fluctuate and remain ambiguous (I am both attracted to but ultimately frustrated by the photograph) that existing certainties and theories pertaining to both mediums are unravelled. Central to this process is the contribution of a dual perspective that combines an examination of the role and materiality of painting through the lens of photography, whilst also using the language of paint to describe and understand the photograph. Utilising two languages, each drawing on a different set of theoretical and methodological frameworks, provides the research with a distinctive voice and a new perspective on the visual and conceptual disjuncture caused as paint collides with the long–lost photograph.

Working through the practice in this way the research brought into question the previous claim by the critic Johannes Meinhardt who, in describing Richter’s “overpainted” photographs, suggested that the addition of paint extended the “essential speechlessness” of the photograph and destabilised its assumed visual “certainty”. Tested and observed through the studio practice, which included an examination of the ontological differences of both mediums noting how they interact with each other when brought together on the same visual plane, and supported by a
critical framework, the research presented a counter position to Meinhardt’s observation. As argued the particular genre of found photography has become an exemplar of uncertainty and unknowability. Plucked from obscurity the “essential speechlessness” implicit within photography is magnified to such an extent that this silence—reinforced and intertwined with a sense of loss—becomes the found photograph’s identity. By comparison the paint is not silent. It has a voice. It is loud and brash. Aligning the two mediums together in this way brings into question the belief that the photograph is certain because of its evidential qualities. The only certainty of the found photograph is that it represents what is lost and gone. Leaving in its wake a sickening and morbid gap. It is in this absence that the paint seems to provide a definitiveness and certainty. The paint does not extend the “speechlessness” of the found photograph; it placates its fluctuating uncertainty and in doing so writes it a new story.

Taking Barthes description of the “punctum” the research provides new insight by proposing paint as a punctum. As explained by Batchen the “punctum” was originally defined as a “supplément,” a term that describes what the viewer brings to the photograph, which in turn defines what in the photograph, is likely to resonate with the viewer. In the context of found photography, arguably the “supplément” and what we bring to it, is a sense of loss, not only for the photographic subject but also for time passing and the irrevocable distance between then and now. These feelings are often manifest and experienced as nostalgia, melancholia or pain. In attempting to puncture the silence and void presented by the found photograph, the applied paint aims to obliterate and negate this suffocating sense of loss and distance (essentially the found photographs “punctum”). In doing so however, the paint creates another “punctum,” which, because of its physical otherness, when compared to the photographic surface seems more solid and certain than the mutable and subjective interpretations of the found photograph. Although the paint may be interpreted as a physical mark that voids the original photograph, I would argue that the damage caused by this visible puncture wound is less than the pain caused by the absence provoked by looking at the lost photograph.

This karthartic impulse ultimately becomes a form of black humour, a paradoxical and dark joke that destroys the very desired photograph I am attracted to. By investigating these compulsions and questioning the push-pull, attraction and repulsion I feel towards the found photograph, I present a new way of understanding
the relationship between paint and this subset of photography. This insight is a timely contribution given the rapidly increasing field of artists who are working with the found photograph. As described, my impulse to paint is distinct from other contemporary artists who work with the found photograph. The paint is not intended to be decorative or to beautify; it is meant (mostly) as a confrontation, meting out the frustration caused by my conflictual relationship with the found photograph. The observation that I aim to upset and subvert existing photographic conventions (the vernacular photograph is not usually classified as art) through the application of paint is bitter–sweet. It is without irony that I acknowledge my painted marks erase, and disappear, a woman that I fell in love with over a photographic time divide (*The Woman with Big Sunglasses*). She has been wholly obliterated by the paint. She now only exists in my memory. In this way the paint becomes the opposite of the current impulsive and repetitious need to constantly photograph everything in order to remember, to provide evidence for, and to placate time (a photographic need that is force-fed by the immediacy and rapacious appetite of the ever expanding digital sphere). *The Woman with Big Sunglasses* is dead. The photograph did not make her immortal, it made her forever unreachable. Her photographic reflection was only ever a shadow.

I could not even get close. The paint finally puts her to rest.

This exposure of the intimate attachments I develop towards the found photographs in my collection opens up the complexity of looking, and the layers of meaning that are interwoven and constructed over time. The research acknowledges how easy it is to be seduced by the found photograph, to be comforted by nostalgic and poignant feelings, by seeming to connect to an anonymous being that lived in the past. I return to Mark Godfrey’s investigative essay on Tacita Dean’s *Floh* where he considers the term or “noeme”, which Barthes uses to describe how photographs verify a person’s actual existence: “‘That-has-been’… The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent.” Godfrey notes that, “Barthes primary references were portrait photographs. In front of them, the viewer most powerfully senses that the person imagined ‘has been’ and thus is irretrievable.” Godfrey offers two alternatives as to how this effect “might” be either lessened or further “redoubled” when “looking at anonymous portraits.” Quoting Kracauer’s essay and his description of the subsequent “shudder” which ensues once the viewer realises the person reflected towards them is in fact dead, Godfrey suggests that:
If any photograph reveals to its viewer its temporal distance from the moment of exposure, and its separation from the subject of the photograph, then it does so much more so when the image is of a complete stranger, for the viewer is distanced from the person in the image to start with… this might mean that the violence of photography is loosened. Precisely because the photograph has nothing to do with your own memory or knowledge, it makes no claims against it. The photograph comes in peace… as you page through the book Floh you do not really ‘shudder’ at your lack of real knowledge of the subject—you never knew them in the first place.

This research however counters this view, suggesting that without any supplementary information and context for the photograph the overriding message of the found photograph is one of loss—it is a lost object, both in what it represents (absence) and in its material function, a painful reminder of the insurmountable distance and gap between what has passed and the personification of Buchloh’s “allegory of death.”

The reaction on viewing the found photograph, as documented in the writings in The Woman with Big Sunglasses, Mr Ranger and Boy moves very swiftly to a calculation as to how old they are and then the realisation and probability that they are dead. There is no context to soften this trauma; the facts are raw—the found photograph may be silent and impenetrable but its reading is not necessarily benign. By bringing together the two mediums of paint and found photograph, chosen precisely because of their antithetical differences, the research draws to attention the distance inherent to the photograph in comparison to the direct graphic liveness and physicality expressed by the paint. By exploring the notion of distance affected by both the “anethesizing” and “platitudeuous” qualities of the photograph, the “lure and fascination” and personal dissonance I initially felt, is explained by understanding the “absence-as-presence” paradox implicit to the photograph. The photograph promises so much, a visual wormhole linking past with present, described by Barthes as containing three temporal planes depicting what “has been absolutely” whilst being “irrefutably present” and yet “already deferred.”

I experience a Barthesian “temporal hallucination” when looking at The Woman with Big Sunglasses. The photographic subject seems so close but she is behind the glass window, totally unreachable, she is dead, flattened, a mirage—a chimera, unaware of my future gaze into a past portal. I am always on the outside looking in. I can never get close. The photograph “mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially,” it is not human, it disrupts and disturbs the
continuum the “constitutive style” of past, present, future; birth, life, death. The paint by comparison is vivid, alive even, though it is an inert dead substance, elemental chemistry, earth and oil mixed: Iron Oxide, Calcium Carbonate, Barium Sulphate, Magnesium Silicate. It represents the human, of being physical, of movement. It is not an empty vessel, like Barthes’ “clowns coat.” The subject hasn’t been neutralised, lost and “anesthetized” beneath the platitudinous surface, in what Barthes calls the “Totality-of-Image” where “the photographic image is full, crammed: no room, nothing can be added to it,”289 going onto state “the Photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed.”290 This sense of violence is all encompassing in the found photograph, an emblem of loss projecting the unknowable and unreachable. As its very antithesis the paint punctures the suffused silence, it is big, a grandiose statement, focused in intent. It represents ego, of action unlike the suffocating impenetrable morbidity of the found photograph. The paint transforms in the way the photograph cannot, it breaks the sweeping glance and fixes the gaze. The “scab” or intrusion sits on top of the impenetrable surface, where you can examine its form, feel its texture. It has a substance where the photograph has none, echoing Richter’s quote “painting always has reality: you can touch the paint; it has presence”. Painting over the face of the photograph, which invariably I am compelled to do, the face being the point that I first connect with, reading into the expressions, noting the beauty and the humanity of the subject. I daub and scribble out eyes, dragging the brush into swirls until whole faces are extinguished. The ego represented through paint—claiming the photograph from its unknowability, its speechless state, and presenting it with a focus and a purpose, connecting back to a corpus, not through a mirrored mechanical plate removed from the physical body but delivered directly through the human hand “the body that throbs”.

The application of paint to the found photograph destabilises the familiar, unsettling the expected and shattering the ordinary. It is a risible joke, of the darkest kind. The paint destroys the very photographic subject it is attempting to reach out and connect with, to reawaken, to revitalize, to touch the subject. In doing so however the paint does not blot out or entirely obliterate, its very state of presentness fixes the interminable temporal oscillations within the photograph. The addition of paint on the surface of the photograph always represents the now, the supplement and what has been added after. This dual relationship between photograph and paint creates a more
settled chronology between what has passed and the present, removing the found orphaned photograph from the ties of representing the real, and the gaping painful absence of what has been lost and will be lost (our own mortality), into a more symbolic sphere of representation. The painted found photograph is no longer *Angulus Novus* trapped in reverse but one that is facing forward.
sacrilege
A violation or misuse of what is regarded as sacred.
Middle English: via Old French from Latin sacrilegium, from sacrilegus 'stealer of sacred things', from sacer, sacr- 'sacred' + legere 'take possession of'.

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Collecting Photographs

Over the past few years I have amassed a collection of nearly 4,000 photographs. This accumulation of vernacular photographs includes mostly found photographs with some photographs sourced from family and personal collections.

Within familial circles I have become known as a collector and keeper of photographs and now own briefcases, shoeboxes, folders, envelopes and all kind of repositoria, which bind and encase various photographic family genealogies together. I am struck how vital these closeted photographs are in galvanising family identity. The photographs I pour over and scan one by one, are no longer destined for public display, although I imagine at one point the various school portraits, wedding photographs and holiday snaps that I am handling, have been publicly paraded on the mantelpiece before being filed and secreted away as no longer having currency or relating to the perpetual pace and continuum of family life. These photographs are like family ghosts, kept hidden away in closets, solitary confinement; boxed up in darkened attic rooms, shunted under beds or squirreled away at the back of the dining room sideboard. Nonetheless they provide an important and invisible psychological framework onto which we can write who we are.
Collecting Photographs

The photographs within my collection date from the early 1900s through to the present, with a particularly leaning towards photographs from the mid decades of the twentieth century—1940 to 1970. This period essentially mirrors my own photographic history, which reaches back three generations to the early 1940s. Those faces and persons depicted beyond this imagined timeline seem to belong to a definite pre-modern age, enveloped in an Edwardian austerity, which like my unknown bearded relative (Photograph 33) becomes a novelty about time and history rather than the reachable and almost graspable past. Kracauer writing eighty years prior to Sontag makes a similar observation as to the effect of temporal distance on the meaning of the photograph:

> Once a photograph ages, the immediate reference to the original is no longer possible. The body of a deceased person appears smaller than the living figure. An old photograph also presents itself as the reduction of a contemporaneous one. The old photograph has been emptied of the life whose physical presence overlay its merely spatial configuration."
As part of my portrait collection I have a series of small passport photographs of young men ranging from the late 1940s and early 1950s. These miniature portraits ooze a particular Hollywood glamour and betray a male confidence, all with strong jawlines, slicked back hair, donned in suit and tie.

Painting over the found photograph
My desire is for the paint to shatter the photographic emulsion. I do not want these beautiful photographs to recede or rest quietly in a stultifying archive, unseen. I want the paint, through its very abrasiveness and action, to shake the photograph from its soporific sleepiness. Literal in its crude application the paint forces us to look longer, in-between and through the surface of the paint to see what lies beneath. This process of re-looking allows us to see and not to just pass over and glance at another old photograph. An ironic position given that the person’s identity has been erased by the very paint that encourages us to look closer.

On one striking portrait I have added a small white gob of paint to the man’s ear—an Errol Flynn lookalike, with angular cheekbones and pleasing lips—then a gap and another three circular globs, which join together in a dot-to-dot line, creating an illusory, part decorative, part censorial eye mask.
In a set of over fifty school and college passport portraits, dating from the 1940s through to the 1970s, I add crude blobular marks to each of the faces. Systematically masking and obliterating the identities underneath, sometimes creating new shapes out of the masks, perhaps vaguely representational of facial features. Working with these I am not sure whether I am denying the photograph an identity or building a new one.

I always find myself calculating the age of the photographic subjects to work out how old they would be today. Simply, are they alive or dead? In these passport photographs the adolescent youthful faces are on the cusp of adulthood. Today they would be in there fifties. What lives have been lived, who survived, and who didn’t?

Barthes, rather morbidly, laments that there are two deaths acknowledged within the photograph—the photographic subject depicted and our own, and that “between the two” there is “nothing more than waiting”.293
Photograph 28.

Found Polaroid, 2012, enamel

_Untitled_

Whilst this research and my photographic collection focuses mainly on the genre of “snapshot” photography, as defined by The Oxford Companion to the Photograph, many of the family photographs I have collected are more formal, taken within a studio setting by professional photographers. These photographs are equally fascinating; babies, siblings, families and portraits; all dressed in their best clothes and posed for the camera. I note how fashions shift with colours moving from muted sepia to the fading Kodachrome of the 1970s, into the digitally accurate photographs of today. Over one hundred and seventy years the fixed smiles however never falter, still persisting into the twenty first century.

Whereas many critics voice their concern over the construct of perceived social norms in photographs, the writer and cultural theorist Simon Watney reflects in _Ordinary Boys_ (2000), on the pressure to adhere to conventions of heterosexuality as a gay child, relating this type of public performance to the social conventions that underpin family photography. Despite the tendency for duplicity, Watney is more forgiving than many critics, as to the wider pressures of wanting to portray, through photographic means at least, a happy version of family life.

Yet I am not convinced that we should simply blame photography for the narrowness of its conventional pictures of family life. Indeed, the very determination to put a brave face on things, to show us all smiling as our teeth chattered on the frozen windswept beach or at the washed-out picnic, only demonstrates our more or less desperate desire to be happy: a dumb, clumsy inchoate awareness that somehow life could be better than it is. This is the poignancy and potency of so much domestic photography.
There is a vibrant market for lost photographs out there in junk shops and cyber space. Thousands, millions of photographs moving into unknown hands: collectors, artists, traders, such is the intrigue for other peoples photographs. Is this the eventual destiny of all our personal photographs—to roam, quite literally, hundreds of years from now, free from original ties of meaning? Just as it is difficult to imagine our death or our pre-existence as described by Nabakov’s chronophobic friend in the introductory quote, it is perhaps equally as hard to imagine our reflective selves without meaning or purpose.

Collecting Photographs
Amassing such a collection invariably means looking at lots of photographs. “Ebay” as a current repository and vehicle for the movement of anonymous photographs is an amazing resource. Thousands and thousands of images from the very early days of photography through to the present are for sale. Sold individually or in batches and albums, photographs are uploaded daily. The images I select sometimes share a similarity to my own experiences (children, family scenes) mostly however the selection process is arbitrary—whatever catches my attention at that particular moment. Albums and sets are best, not only are they more economic but you get the unknown surprises hidden within the pages. I now have favourite dealers, who constantly update their collections. One seller based in the US creates his own categories and sets, bringing together photographs that share a common subject or theme and giving them generic labels, for example, “21 Hunks-Man-Posed-Portrait,” which describes a collection of photographs depicting men of all ages. The now quaint term “Hunk” in this context embraces dapper and distinguished old men along with a more Hollywood version of beautiful youthful males. These pre-sorted collections include photographs from the 1920s through to the 1990s. Similar batches are titled “Sexy-Mothers with Children,” describing a series of mothers holding babies or children; posing and smiling for the camera, again all ages are represented, with some older women portrayed. Others are themed by events such as, “Party-Time-Eat-Drink”, a batch which contains an array of photographs depicting people all celebrating in one way or another; children’s birthday parties; elaborate dinner parties; family barbeques; drunken groups of party revellers—holding their beer bottles or glasses and
leering into the camera. Again these images include photographs dating from the 1930s through to the present. I make contact with the seller to understand why he titles the batches of photographs in such a way and he explains that these titles operate as ‘tags,’ summarising the content and attracting the attention of buyers through a mass of other online photographic imagery.

Some of the photographs in these batches are entirely random and innocuous, photographic accidents similar to Richter’s rejects. One fairly recent photograph from this particular US seller, a Polaroid (circa 1980s-1990s) shows a woman opening the door of a modern fridge, whilst another woman is washing the dishes in the background, both seem unaware of the camera and the photograph seems utterly random. The photographs separated and organized into these categories by the seller initially seem unrelated in any way, resulting in a pick ‘n’ mix selection of photographs, sweeping up and representing large tracks of social history across the last century. After collecting numerous batches from this particular dealer however I begin to piece together and regroup persons and families who have been separated by this form of categorisation.
Collecting photographs

During the process of sifting and sorting photographs within my collection I reflected on my endless fascination with the found photograph, referring to Barthes’ statement: “Always the Photograph astonishes me, with an astonishment which endures and renews itself, inexhaustibly. Perhaps this astonishment, this persistence reaches down into the religious substance out of which I am moulded.” This alignment to religion and mythology reflects Warner’s observation that seeing the reflected self is deep-rooted within the human imagination, and closely aligned, as Krauss seems to suggest, to the deification of religious relics such as the Turin shroud. Critics such as Mark Godfrey, echo Bourdieu’s sociological dismissal of family photographs, when reflecting on the artist Fiona Tan’s collection of Norwegian family photographs *Vox Populi* (2004), which he describes as “quasi-anthropological” […] “For all their difference, people tend to represent themselves in the same way… Amateur family photography is obviously as controlled and controlling a space as advertising.”

My experience of looking through a vast collection of vernacular photographs takes a counter view—despite the social cues and fake smiles, I find the photographic subjects endlessly intriguing. For example, in my collection of studio portraits (about 400+), despite the apparent restrictive photographic formula of a tight crop to the head and shoulders, each photograph reveals a wide heterogeneity within the human face. Other photographs which I label under a catch all ‘General/or interesting’ category, offer up photographs showing a shared similarity in subject matter or content; celebrations, family outings and numerous posings for the camera, however even here the photograph operates as a distinct visual summation or individual declaration of someone’s presence, revealing infinite differences in décor, dress, body type and expression. These photographs feature in the artist bookworks *Some People* (see sample pages in Appendix 2.)
Collecting photographs
The one exception in my collection that defers from Barthes’ description of perpetual “astonishment” is the children’s portrait photographs. The collection is not large, representing about 200 photographs in total, yet when I look at them the sense of distance becomes vast. Even studio portraits of my own children, alongside similar posed photographs of myself as a ten–month–old, engender a blankness (Appendix 2, Baby series,). It is in this vacuum of nothingness that I anticipate the marks I will make—visibly negating as opposed to creating. Barthes’ identification of how certain codes inflect our reading is evident in these baby photographs, where the code supersedes and outstrips any notion of authenticity or of being. As discussed in Part Three, 3.3 Paint as Punctum I find Barthes’ reference to “punctum” as “a supplément” a more accurate term for describing how I approach photographs. Batchen argues that it is not the difference between Barthes’ “punctum” and “studium” that matters, rather it is recognising “their relationship… their poststructural inseparability” that is important. Barthes’ notion of the “studium”, quoted in full:

To recognize the studium is inevitably to encounter the photographer’s intentions…. The studium is a kind of education (knowledge and civility, ‘politeness’).…. Which allows me to discover the Operator, to experience the intentions which establish and animate his practices, but to experience them ‘in reverse,’ according to my will as a Spectator. It is rather as if I had to read the Photographer’s myths in the Photograph, fraternizing with them but not quite believing in them. These myths obviously aim (this is what myth is for) at reconciling the Photograph with society (is this necessary?—Yes, indeed: the Photograph is dangerous) by endowing it with functions, which are, for the Photographer, so many alibis. These functions are: to inform, to represent, to surprise, to cause, to signify, to provoke desire. And I, the
Spectator, I recognize them with more or less pleasure: I invest them with my studium (which is never my delight or my pain).  

When looking at the collection of baby photographs, it is the stiff, artificial and formulaic poses, meant to perpetuate the myth of happy baby, which so aptly fits with Barthes’ “studium”. Even Wendy in her perpetual time warp and envelope of tragedy, begins to blur into empty vacuousness. They are not Real in a Lacanian sense nor do they seem to represent a reality or vitality. Perhaps the “supplément” in this context is my ire and annoyance, which I bring to the photograph through the application of paint.
Photograph 32.

I have two small photo booth images, both black and white, which date somewhere between the 1930s and 1940s. They are discoloured and faded to sepia, conveying a strong sense of the past and being distant from now. One is of a man in a suit and tie, he has a strong jaw line and he is not looking directly at the camera he is looking ever so slightly upwards and to the right, staring at some point in the distance. His smile is beatific and calm; he is posing, revealing (perhaps) his best side. In the other photograph the man is wilder and less composed. At first I thought he was a sailor, decked out in a white smock and neckerchief. On close inspection however (and these photographs are tiny 1½ inch x 2 inch portraits), the man is wearing what looks like a painters smock with a fringed scarf wrapped around his neck. His hair is ruffled and windswept—tufts standing up on end against the sepia background, unlike the controlled short back and sides of the gentleman in a suit. Is he a beatnik artist and the other an upwardly mobile salesman—two variants of men’s fashions and two possible fictions?

Painting over the found photograph

On one I apply a thumb smudge of dirty grey pink to his mesmeric face and drag it slowly from the left cheek to the edge of the photograph; a horizontal smear that hides his eyes but still leave the firm jaw line and Hollywood smile intact. In the other a thicker, livelier blob of solid pink acrylic reveals the heel mark and footprint of the brush—painted marks which obliterate and deny most of his face.

The making of these marks can be interpreted as crude and blunt, serving to jar and disturb the smooth surface of the photograph. In Writing the Image after Roland Barthes (1996), the writer and literary critic Jean-Michel Rabaté describes Cy Twombly’s deliberate use of naïve and primitive marks as, “Drawing the graphic equivalent of the prelinguistic utterance and so sacrificing linguistic competence by reducing one’s means”. I consider that the marks I make on these photo portraits are perhaps graphic “utterances” or more likely, in the photographs described above, stutters, simplistic signs of acknowledgement. Barthes would be so bold as to say “Love” as he does when writing in Camera Lucida about looking at the “only photograph” of his father and mother together:
What is it that will be done away with, along with this photograph which yellows, fades, and will someday be thrown out, if not by me—too superstitious for that—at least when I die? Not only ‘life’ (this was alive, this posed live in front of the lens), but also, sometimes – how to put it? – love. In front of the only photograph in which I find my father and mother together, this couple who I know loved each other, I realize: it is love-as-treasure which is going to disappear forever; for once I am gone, no one will any longer be able to testify to this: nothing will remain but an indifferent Nature. 300
As a recognized keeper of photographs’ family willingly hand over a number of photographs whose identities and histories are unknown. Some of these photographs often reveal a vague familial resemblance, a definite jaw line, a particular setting of the eye, but beyond a crude visual phrenology, all meaning has been lost. One such nameless portrait, a photograph circa 1900, faded to sepia, features a traditional head and shoulder portrait of a man; resplendent and dignified with a bushy white moustache and side burns. Amish in style, his beard grows seamlessly down from his receding hairline, tracing the line of his jaw and creating a wiry neck ruff of hair beneath his chin. I swear I can see a perennial familial quality: an aquiline nose, an amused gaze. This is not of my father’s genome, whose dark broodiness traces through to my own photographic reflection, and into my son, rather I see perhaps his brother (my uncle) who, as my father is dark, he is fair. Later though, my doubts are raised as to a possible familial connection when, as my collection multiplies and portraits from a similar age and dress come in, I find numerous possibilities for photographic doubles and doppelgängers beginning to present themselves.
APPENDIX 1.

Illustration 1.


Illustration 2.

Illustration 3.


Illustration 4.

Illustration 5.

Gerhard Richter, from the *Firenze 2000* series. Oil on chromogenic color print on synthetic polymer sheet, (12 cm × 12 cm each).

Illustration 6.

Illustration 7

Maurizio Anzeri, *Yvonne* (2011) Embroidery on photograph, 25cm x 19.5cm

http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/maurizio_anzeri.htm?section_name=photography

Illustration 8 and 9.

Illustration 10.


Illustration 11.

John Goto, three panels 1, 7, 52, from the *Loss of Face* series (2002). Inkjet prints on cotton paper from digitally scanned silver negatives (15 cm x 100 cm each).
APPENDIX 2.

PAINTING OVER FOUND PHOTOGRAPHS

The supporting practice submitted as an exhibition as part of this research includes bodies of work that paint directly over the original found photograph, artists bookworks and reprinted digital photographs that have been scanned from the original photograph.

List of exhibition material accompanying the thesis

1. Found Passport Photograph series (2011-2012). Presented as a series, enamel and acrylic paint on found colour and black and white passport photographs, (originals from approx.1920s to 1990s).


3. Selection of baby photographs (2011-2012). Presented as a series, enamel and acrylic paint on found colour and black and white photographs (approx. 1950s–1970s) varying sizes (2011-2012). This series also includes up four large inkjet painted over reprints of originals, 110cm x 65cm


5. The Woman with Big Sunglasses (2010-2012). Presented as a series, 25 painted over Polaroids (approx. 19760s-1970s), enamel and acrylic paint onto colour photographs, 9cm x 9cm each.


Artist Bookworks


Sketchbooks 1–4, containing various photographic experiments.
THE POLAROID SERIES

In his essay ‘When the Earth was Square, 1960-1978’ Matthew Witkovsky notes how many of the instant cameras used during the 1960s and 1970s created square prints. Whilst this format had been used previously, it was, “the sheer quantity of such prints generated in the 1960s and 1970s... [which] lends the period an identifiable look.” Witkovsky suggests, “the square shape supplants narrative flow with iconic stasis,” recognizing that “square images have a lineage in modern painting ... More than in any period, high art in the 1960s embraced this shape and its cubic permutations.”

Found Polaroid, 2012 (9cm x 9cm), acrylic.

Barthes dismisses the suggestion that painters invented photography “by bequeathing it their framing, the Albertian perspective”, arguing that it was invented by “chemists.” However the small white margin of the Polaroid is perhaps closest to a painted canvas, providing a small vignette into the tussle between photograph and paint. It is the one series where the photograph remains visible underneath the paint, allowing for a dialogue and frisson to develop between both materials.
LANDSCAPES (FROM THE POLAROID SERIES)

In my collection I have a black hardboard bound landscape photo-album, featuring about 100 photographs, which I estimate date from the late 1950s to the early 1970s. Some are black and white and some are colour. All of the photographs are of landscapes or townscapes. None of them focus on people unless they are part of the scenery. On each page four photographs are neatly configured in a square formation. The photographs reflect a mid twentieth century Middle England, in a period of transition as agriculture slowly gave way to suburban creep, evidenced by the shiny clusters of neat new housing estates populating the far horizon. Many pages hold serial photographs documenting brand new ring roads and roundabouts. Some of the photographs depict empty roads or fields snaking into the middle distance to a nondescript—somewhere. A group of faded colour photographs, taken from a high vantage point look across scrubland into a valley where an unfocused smudge reveals a nameless town or city. Seemingly locked in a previous industrial past, rows of tenement housing bank the valley and wisps of smoke leach out of tall chimney stacks rising from blurry old Victorian warehouses. These photographs depicting a premodernised townscape are the minority however, with many pages featuring neat quartets of photographs prospecting empty fields and vast sweeps of agriculture land, punctuated only by the patterned striations of traditional English hedgerows that cordon and mark a patchwork of fields and farmland. The ordered structure and substance within the photographs seem to indicate an obsessive practice of looking and documenting, whilst the lack of people suggests this was a solitary activity.

I imagine the author to be an architect or town planner, surveying open fields for the decades to come, tracing out and formulating new highways and byways, ‘A’ roads, ring roads and motorways. Or perhaps another lonelier version draws an obsessive hobbyist or a solitary collector compelled to undertake an orderly and systematic documentation of the changing English landscape, for no other purpose than a private compulsion to catalogue.
The plain fields and endless roads, which promise a blank canvas for the paint, end up yielding nothing. The painted marks are devoid of meaning—there is no compulsion to connect the past with the present. It is empty abstraction, reinforcing what I already know—that my attraction/frustration towards the photograph is a commentary on the human.
Reprinted found photograph, 2012 (42cm x 59.4cm) enamel
Reprinted found photograph, 2012 (42cm x 59.4cm) enamel
Reprinted found photograph, 2012 (42cm x 59.4cm) enamel
Reprinted found photograph, 2012 (42cm x 59.4cm) enamel
Reprinted found photograph, 2012 (42cm x 59.4cm) enamel
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Reprinted found photograph, 2012 (42cm x 59.4cm) enamel
Reprinted found photograph, 2012 (42cm x 59.4cm) enamel
Reprinted found photograph, 2012 (42cm x 59.4cm) enamel
Reprinted found photograph, 2012 (42cm x 59.4cm) enamel
FOUND POSTCARDS

Found postcard, 2012 (various sizes) enamel and acrylic
Found postcard, 2012 (various sizes) enamel and acrylic
Found postcard, 2012 (various sizes) enamel and acrylic
Found postcard, 2012 (various sizes) enamel and acrylic
Found postcard, 2012 (various sizes) enamel and acrylic
PAINTED BOOKWORKS

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From Some People Artist Book III, 2012 (27cm x 23cm) acrylic, crayon, pen
From Some People Artist Book III, 2012 (27cm x 23cm) acrylic, crayon, pen
From *Some People* Artist Book III, 2012 (27cm x 23cm) acrylic, crayon, pen
From Some People Artist Book III, 2012 (27cm x 23cm) acrylic, crayon, pen
From *Some People* Artist Book III, 2012 (27cm x 23cm) acrylic, crayon, pen
From *Some People* Artist Book III, 2012 (27cm x 23cm) acrylic, crayon, pen
From *Some People* Artist Book III, 2012 (27cm x 23cm) acrylic, crayon, pen
From Some Children Artist Book 2011-2012, (18cm x 18cm) enamel and pen.
From Some People Artist Book IV, 2012 (42cm x 29cm) enamel, acrylic, crayon, pen
From Some People Artist Book IV, 2012 (42cm x 29cm) enamel, acrylic, crayon, pen
From *Some People* Artist Book IV, 2012 (42cm x 29cm) enamel, acrylic, crayon, pen
From *Some People* Artist Book IV, 2012 (42cm x 29cm) enamel, acrylic, crayon, pen
BABY PHOTOGRAPHS

Digitally reprinted photograph from original photograph, 2012 (92 x 135cm) enamel
From Some Children Artist Book, 2011-2012, (18cm x 18cm) enamel and pen
From Some Children Artist Book, 2011-2012, (18cm x 18cm), enamel and pen.
PASSPORT PHOTOGRAPHS

Found passport photographs, 2012 (various sizes) enamel paint and acrylic
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7 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 3.
8 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 51.
14 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 57.
29 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 57.
30 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 89.
33 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 80.
35 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 12.
44 Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria*, 34.
52 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 75.
56 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 113.
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63 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 89-90.
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