IMITATING LIFE:

EXPLORING REENACTMENT
IN THE AGE OF THE INSTANT IMAGE

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This text explores the demise of the family album in the era of social networks, and the implications of photographic reenactments. Drawing on my practice and related research, I examine the images and image-making engendered by the virtual album and the implications of image-sharing. Reenactment suggests acting-out, yet the family album also involves reenactment because the subject is consciously posing another self to the camera instead of being natural because they are taking into consideration the potential viewer and want to remember their happy personas.

On Facebook the virtual album has replaced the material object the family album once was. I investigate the emotional and theoretical consequences of the digital shared image in relation to questions of subjectivity in photography. In my practice I reenact the kind of staging already occurring in many photographs, thus 'doubling' the process. This dissertation examines the photographic image, intimacy, reenactment, the relational and the ideal, in an era of rapid social change. These topics will be explored via various types of photographic images, and supported with theoretical writings in the fields of photography and sociology. This dissertation stems from my practice. I am part of a generation that is in the midst of a transformative stage. My childhood is documented in old-style family photo albums. But ten years ago, I started uploading photographs onto the Internet, saving them in a virtual space rather than on paper. The next stage was, of course, the sharing of those photos on the social networks, a phenomenon present in the past 4-5 years. Ever since I began taking photographs I have been drawn to archives and to everyday images. This interest led to a number of my projects revolving around family photos or photographs of intimate encounters shared between people. In my latest work I used found material from sources such as films, family albums, Facebook and Google. I choose images that seem idealised, fantasies that I am drawn to. My work examines changes in the emotional status and character of the photographic image in light of digital social networks. Through the various types of images and the relationships between them I attempt to understand questions about the relationship between fiction and reality.

I wish to investigate this transformation of the concrete family album into a virtual, open sharing space. What are the economic, psychological, political, social and cultural implications of this important and somewhat rapid, change? Besides the saving of costs and materials (films, digital), inputting our happy moments onto social networks arouses my curiosity. What happens when the personal family photograph transgresses from an intimate and private space to the public sphere? Do friends become our new family instead of the blood-related family?

Beyond this technological social change, I would like to investigate the act of reenactment inside this virtual space. To whom belongs the authorship of these shared photos? Do they become material, a readymade that anyone can appropriate? What is the difference between reenactment and a self-portrait? What happens to the photograph when it becomes an artistic reference? This dissertation will hopefully enable me to answer all these questions and to expand my ongoing research not just in a practical way but also in a theoretical one.

3/ Rapid Change in the Family Album

In recent years, digital imagery has replaced traditional forms of photography. Until the advent of digital media, taking a photograph could have been regarded as an event. Special moments had been preserved in, and by the image. Furthermore, in the actual process of capturing, the photograph already held its future status as a vestige. The advent of Facebook has eclipsed the ceremony we associate with the family photograph and its narrative. On Facebook the story is missing, we see a photograph without context, and lose the memories associated with the event.

In the digital age the majority of photographic images are taken using digital cameras, smartphone devices or web cams and are then shared by email and via social networks. Between 2002 and 2011 4.2 billion camera phones were sold worldwide, and in 2011 more than one billion were sold. By 2017 there will be more mobile phones than people on the planet.[1] In the very near future, most of the people in the world will carry a camera 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. With most of these devices people can share their freshly-taken photographs immediately via e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat and by other means; we can take a photograph and export it to the virtual sphere instantaneously. The implications of this kind of photography open up a range of questions, which I will elaborate upon further in this paper.

As part of my artistic practice, I look at the family photographs of people I meet. These photo albums present individual biographies and personal memories. They contain pictures of family members long gone, and of different places and times. Among these pictures, I seek those that represent 'ideal' moments, I look for common structures, patterns and popular visual forms that recur in these captured 'Kodak-moments' which are then stored in the family album. I have collected photographs that contain happy familial moments, regular domestic occurrences, and special occasions; moments from intimate family events. These can also be seen as what Jo Spence and Patricia Holland have termed 'correct and ideal' photographs for the way in which they capture happy family

moments.[2] Family albums portray ideal images in the sense that they offer a particular narrative of a certain reality that is not necessarily representative of an actual reality; an editing process is involved where unwanted family members are removed from its visual history. This sort of emotive censorship and reconstruction ultimately contributes to the creation of the biggest illusion: the happy family.

For the most part, family albums showed the traditional nuclear family: a mother, a father, children, and perhaps a dog. In these idealised photographs individual members are seen as part of the family unit. This unit is presented in a set of images arranged in the photo album. Regardless of the banality of the pictures or their chaotic arrangement, the family album tends to gain a somewhat sacred character, establishing a happy illusion shaped by the common cultural norms of society.

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1 This matter was discussed in the International Summer School of Photography (ISSP) by Teun van der Heijden in his lecture *The Beauty of The Photo Book*, 6 August 2013.

2 Jo Spence and Patricia Holland, (eds.) *Family Snaps: The Meaning of Domestic Photography*, London: Virago Press, (1988), 1991, p. 7.

Fig.1, Found Family Photograph, date unknown

Fig.2, Found Family Photograph, date unknown

In *Camera Lucida* Roland Barthes sees photographs as both referent and proof of the past. As such, they represent the real event 'that has been'.[3] Following Barthes' notion, I use actual family album photographs as my source material. They function as research into the construction of the family album from a period between the 1980s and the late 1990s.

The status of the family album led me to examine a related set of images, from the digital era - photographs posted via social networks, namely Facebook: profile pictures, photos of groups of friends, and 'selfies'. This type of imagery made me consider Facebook in terms of a contemporary platform for the transformed family album. New digital platforms, such as Picasa, designed for the self-publishing of family photos have meant that significantly fewer images are being printed. The digital family album is no longer a physical object to be passed down through generations and looked at repeatedly or on special occasions. The virtual family album is always at a tactile distance, seen on screens. Could this distance point to a shift or change in the emotional value of the traditional family photo?

My working process involved sifting through Facebook profiles, choosing images of people around my age with similarities in terms of birthplace, location and general lifestyle. I sought profile pictures, staged group shots, 'selfies' and snaps, which I then divided into genres and themes. After contemplating the images for some time, I noticed that those that I found most interesting were profile pictures and photos in which two people were photographed – one knowingly and the other not. The following images illustrate how this generates a split gaze within the frame.

Fig.3, Facebook Photo (*Ace and Me*), August 19, 2008

3 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, London: Random House, 2000, p.76 – 77.

Fig.4, Found Facebook Photo (Chatting), November 13, 2012

Fig.5, Found Facebook Photo (*New Year*), August 9, 2009
Fig.6, Found Facebook Photo (*Countryside*), January 2, 2012

Fig.7, Facebook Profile Picture (*Selfie 1*), August 19, 2010

Fig.8, Facebook Profile Picture (*Selfie 2*), July 19, 2009

Looking at the mass of photographs I had collected, my first impression was that the traditional image of the familial narrative in current times had changed visually and the photographer as mediator is no longer relevant. In family photo albums there tends to be a strong sense of togetherness, of pictures taken for their value in preserving familial bonds and history, and thus emphasizing aspects of time and space within the images. In Facebook pictures there is a noted shift from the external-familial individual identity of each member to a hyper-individuality. Whereas visual markers in family photos serve the image's intended purpose, for example, pictures taken on special occasions, like a graduation and a birthday. Because many of the pictures posted on Facebook are shot with smart-phone, by the person/people in the picture, images tend to be more casual. There is a strong emphasis on moods and general ambiance, an abundance of close-up portraits, or pictures with select or random friends, special events or occasions. The new digital images are presented in a myriad of movement, blurring the background that has lost its meaning. It disappears in closed-up images: the individual is the subject of her or his own photograph, the master of their visual image and its projection in the social network which has now become the uniform background divide by the Facebook interface. Gone are the little personal idiosyncrasies and quirks found in family albums and gone is its reassuring material physicality. These are now replaced with a simple, pragmatic, functional computer interface, whose design is forever changing in accordance with the business owners' interests. This kind of interface relates closely to the function Susan Sontag associated with the role of images in capitalist societies, which according to Sontag, require an image-based culture for two main reasons: to stimulate consumption and to pacify social, political and gender discrimination. In short, to maintain the status quo and the hegemonic order: creating images for people to emulate and creating visual norms. In order to do so, capitalist societies need to gather unlimited amounts of information. Thus, she writes, 'Cameras define reality in the two ways essential to the workings of an advanced industrial society: as a spectacle (for masses) and as an object of surveillance (for rulers). The production of images also furnishes a ruling ideology. Social change is replaced by a change in images.'[4] The freedom to consume the image is thus equated with freedom itself, narrowing political choice to freedom of consumption,

which requires unlimited production and consumption of images.[5]

In her article, *What is the Social in Social Media?* Geert Lovink claims that social media sites are not nostalgic projects aiming at reviving the once dangerous potential of *the social* i.e. subversive or revolutionary fractions. Instead, the social is 'reanimated as a simulacrum of its own ability to create meaningful and lasting social relations'.[6] In other words, social media creates an illusion. Being active in social networks engenders an increasingly diminished commitment to our traditional roles in the family, neighbourhood and wider community. Our historical definition as citizens has been transformed into notions of 'subjects with agency, dynamic actors called *users*…The social is no longer a reference to society'.[7] Individual, virtual social profiles are defined by an intricate network of visual and textual data: areas of interest, political views, relationship status, favourite music, films, books, where we live, studied, worked, travelled, or visited. To these are added our 'likes', 'shares' and 'events', and lastly, our host of virtual friends. The question is do these 'personal markers', arranged neatly on the Facebook interface, have real impact on our actuality. Lovink suggests that while they may seem to solve problems like boredom, isolation, depression and unfulfilled desires, social networks present a 'Simulacrum of the Social'[8] as an organized agony over the loss of community, flagging and emphasizing the fragmentation of family and friendship.

In her introduction to *Family Snaps: The Meaning of Domestic Photography'* (1988), Patricia Holland writes: 'Recording an event has become part of that event – and perhaps the most important part…'[9] Likewise, it seems, the sharing of photographs in the virtual public sphere has become essential in contemporary photography. Even back in the era of the family album, photographs were idealized as if created for the eyes of someone outside the family unit, as if craving a larger audience.[10] Currently, the easy access and availability of instant-media allow for an exposure or self-absorption that would formerly

4 Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, London: Penguin Books, London, 2008, p. 178-9.

5 Ibid.,

6 Geert Lovink, "What Is the Social in Social Media?", e-flux Journal, 2011, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/what-is-the-social-in-social-media, p.3 (accessed 22 May 2013).

7 Ibid.,

8 Ibid.,

9 Jo Spence and Patricia Holland, (eds.) *Family Snaps: The Meaning of Domestic Photography*, London: Virago Press, (1988), 1991 p. 2

10 Ibid., p. 7

have been private. Joanne Finkelstein speaks of an increased self-consciousness, defined by the ways in which others see us. In this era of a 'heightened level of attention',[11] fleeting impressions and self-presentation are key. If selecting and editing our finest moments was an issue in the age of the family album, it has become a major aspect of the social network where, in a matter of seconds, photos can be uploaded and shared – waiting for comments and 'likes'. And yet, the editing process in the family album is generally enacted by the album owner, who creates a narrative from the images. While the Facebook platform ostensibly offers endless storage for images, it also ultimately sets the frame for the type of images that can be uploaded by users. Hence, self-consciousness is limited to a generic Facebook logo profile (Figure 9), or the individual user's each and every move, within the limits of Facebook's ethical and commercial guidelines.
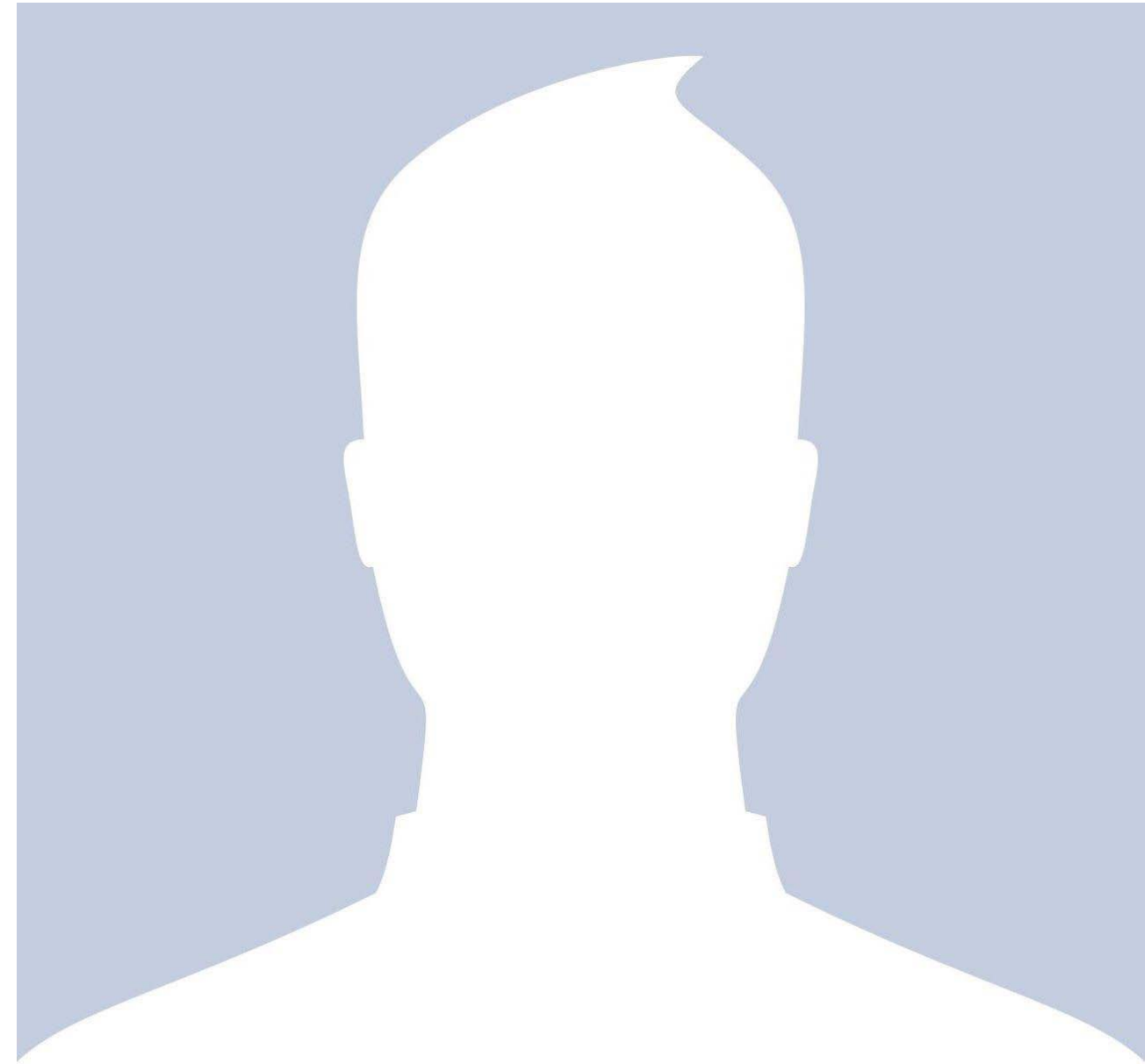
Fig.9, Facebook Logo Picture, 2013

11 Joanne Finkelstein, *The Art Of Self Invention: Image and Identity in Popular Visual Culture*, London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2007, p. 122

The contemporary image and its aesthetics seem unimportant, or irrelevant today; in *Ugly Is the New Pretty: How Unattractive Selfies Took Over the Internet*, Rachel Hills describes how even 'bad' selfies attract thousands of fans to Facebook due to their humour, or their capture of the unattractive yet interesting facets of everyday life.[12] The selfie has taken photography to a whole new level of acting out in order to share and publish one's image instantaneously on the social network. This Instagram image of Justin Bieber, is an example of a typical selfie, a hint of an outstretched arm holding the camera, the closed–off scene, fashionable sunglasses, and the 'funny face' pose.[13]

Fig.10, Justin Bieber posing with a monkey, 2013

12 Rachel Hills, "Ugly Is the New Pretty: How Unattractive Selfies Took Over the Internet," *The Cut*, 2013, http://nymag.com/thecut/2013/03/ugly-is-the-new-pretty-a-rise-in-gross-selfies.html (accessed 18 May 2013)

13 Bim Adewunmi, "The rise and rise of the 'selfie'," *The Guardian*, 2 April, 2013." http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2013/apr/02/rise-and-rise-of-the-selfie, (accessed 18 March 2013)

Internet imagery platforms, whether social networks or software like Picasa and Flickr, also affect the temporality of images. While it is possible to return over and over to the same image (like a family photo album), the actual viewing experience is very different. Whereas images in a biscuit tin may be looked at repeatedly, with family members gathered around, computer images are mostly viewed in solitude. Ironically, we may have more social connections, but we tend to make them alone, each one from her or his private room or cell phone, with virtual rather than physical ties. Even traditional meeting places such as pubs or sports clubs are places where many prefer to engage in virtual connections rather than conversing with those around them.

New digital image applications also alter the temporality of internet images, for example the smart phone application *Snap That* allows the capture of a photograph to be sent via the chat function of the application. The catch is that the photograph will disappear after a few seconds. *Snap That* was mainly created for taking erotic and pornographic photographs during sex chats, which flags another aspect of how virtual relations replace the real.[14]

An additional layer in the Facebook image is textual, with features that allow users to add captions, tags, and maps for sharing and posting on a timeline. Facial recognition software, automatic GPS and Facebook questions about location and people, transform this relic of a traditional photo album into a powerful marketing tool. Whereas family album captions conjure memories from a shared past, Facebook captions are used by sophisticated algorithms that send the right advertising to specific users. This strengthens the false feeling that there is some kind of human presence behind the computer screen, when actually it functions for consumerist and hegemonic purposes. Tagging digital images allows users to add friends who do not necessarily appear in the photograph. Likewise, users can be tagged by friends without their knowledge or prior consent. In this way, tagging becomes a tool for further distancing of images from their creators, and from their temporality and specific circumstances.

Fig.11, Screen-shot from Facebook, June 10, 2011

14 This matter was discussed in the CHS lectures series The Poetics of Trace by Michael Newman in his lecture The Trace of Forgetting, 4 March 2013

This gives tagged images an additional function, photographs no longer register specific emotions and associations within a family history, but tagging adds signifiers which flag external indexes that rewrite or reinvent history. The relationships between the image and its tag are interdependent, an image cannot exist in a social network without being shared and tagged, and the 'untitled' is now obsolete.

In this screen-shot from Facebook, I was 'tagged' and named on an empty chair by my friend in her sixth birthday party; though we met for the first time twelve years later.

In Jewish tradition an empty chair can be kept for an invisible guest who is often a magician. Digital technology performs the magic trick by inserting an invisible friend a decade later.

Arguably, Facebook functions as an anti-family unit; 'friends' are 'cool' and relevant in documenting young contemporary life. This kind of function leads to questions as to whether families still keep a record of events in the form of a family album. Sean O'Hagan asserts that, 'If the photography book is currently thriving as a medium, the old-fashioned photo album does seem very much a thing of the past'.[15] The traditional family album has broken out of the private sphere and shifted into a public, transformed, virtual, exposed, social space. As Joanna Moorhead has suggested, photography has made its debut after a century and a half, especially with the coming of the digital age.[16] Does this imply that anyone can be a photographer and that the artistic model photography has established might need to be reaxemine?

In following through on these ideas, I will investigate the current status of the tangible, enclosed, warm, intimate image. As a Facebook user, friends serve as virtual characters I 'add as a friend', although I do not know most of them personally. Building on the assumption that family and real friends are no longer part of our visual identity, we are left with ourselves and our profiles; this lends our visual social identity a sense of loneliness and narcissism. According to Bill Davidow, the more Facebook friends a person has the more narcissistic a personality s/he will have as well. That goes for both our 'online' and 'offline' personalities.[17] This narcissistic shift in relations is discussed by Saman Shad in her article *Facebook, can I share something with you? It's about our relationship*. Shad argues that people feel the need to over-share unimportant stuff such as a photograph of what they are about to eat or a status of their mundane everyday activity, thus over-exposing their narcissistic tendencies.[18] Our 'profile' serves as a passive echo of a newly

popular narcissism that we repeat, mimic, share and upload to our 'status'. This has had implications in the reconstruction of the portrait in 21st century photography.

15 Sean O'Hagan, "Album of the years: can photo album survive the digital age?", *The Guardian*, 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/jun/14/photo-albums-digital-collection, (accessed 24 February 2013).

16 Joanna Moorhead, "A family snap makes this moment last a lifetime", *The Independent on Sunday*, 23rd September 2012, p.42

17 Bill Davidow, "The Internet 'Narcissism Epidemic'": Don't let popularity set your standard", *The Atlantic*, 2013,http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/03/the-internet-narcissism-epidemic/274336/, (accessed 22 May 2013)

18 Saman Shad, "Facebook, can I share something with you? It's about our relationship", *The Guardian*, 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/oct/04/facebook-relationship-narcissists , (accessed 2 June 2013).

4/ Self-portraiture and Reenactment

4.1/ Reenactments

Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* (1977–1980) utilize the self-portrait as a series of images of feminine cinematic stereotypes. While they are called 'film stills', they are actually not, nor are they reenactments. This series, and most of Sherman's subsequent work, is based in photographic reinterpretations of familiar visual typographies that stem from popular imagery, such as films, photojournalism, and the history of art. The focus is on the portrayal of the self, as Lynn Gumpert contends, 'pretending to be someone else provided a template for posing'.[19] Sherman's use of manufactured image template is an opportunity for her to endow a persona with a real identity, while at the same time this act allows her to question her own identity. This in turn, raised questions about the boundaries of private and social identity and individuality. Although Sherman's work is an extensive study of the self-portrait, it raises questions regarding what qualifies as one.

If for Sherman the photographic reference is in shared cultural signifiers and symbols, Trish Morrissey uses her private biography as reference point. Her parents' house in Dublin and its surroundings serve as the location for many of her photographic series, including *Seven Years* (2001-2004). In it, her sister became half of a double act with Morrissey herself. The scenarios they played out were only partially based on their family's history. But, as Alison Green remarks, they 'have the haunting, stilled (or stultifying) quality of one's own memories of privately painful experiences of ordinary events'.[20] Morrissey's images are those that would stay outside the family album; they expose the awkwardness and anguish lurking in the fringes of conventional 'happy' images. Green has described Morrissey's practice as a 'documentary aesthetic' in which staging exposes the impossibility of representation; and the problems of constructing photographic meaning-imagining, remembering, planning, staging, acting, looking, deciding. Major issues such as family experiences, gender roles, private and public identity, and relationships between

Fig.12, Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #13*, black-and-white photograph, 1978

19 Shelley Rice, *Inverted Odysseys, London: Grey Art Gallery*, New York University, Museum of Contemporary Art, MIT Press, 1999, p. vii
20 Alison Green, Vitamin Ph, Survey of International Contemporary Photography, Phaidon Press, 2006.

strangers are examined through the ability of photography to test their boundaries.[21]

Nikki S. Lee, takes reenactment to yet a further extreme. Not satisfied with art, historical or popular images as references, or with her own family history, she immerses herself into different cultural and ethnic groups. Taking up the physical and cultural markers of various people, Lee investigates identity and vernacular photography. Her work raises various questions about current photography. Her disappearance in reenactments can be seen as a form of self-portraiture, and also as reenactments of other people's moments and events. But what differentiates a self-portrait from a reenactment?

Fig.13, Nikki S. Lee, *The Hiphop Project (1)*, Fujiflex colour print, 2001
Fig.14, Nikki S. Lee, *The Seniors Project (26)*, Fujiflex colour print, 1999

21   Ibid.,

The shift from shared cultural references to seemingly random visual signs is, in some respects, parallel to the transformation of the family album as a concrete object into an open, shared, virtual space. This makes any given photograph available for both practice and research, because the photograph functions as a ready-made that anyone can use and claim. After uploading a photograph onto a social network, aside from those viewing it passively, it might also be shared, commented on, liked, tagged – all forms of action that take it out of the individual's control. In my research, I reenacted photographs and image captions I collected from anonymous family photos and Facebook profiles. These images are reenacted with friends and people that I meet in my everyday life. Below are examples of the same photographs (presented in chapter 3), mimicked, and reenacted, with myself inserted in the frame.

Fig.15, Reenactment (*Family Photograph*), 2013

Fig.16, Reenactment (*Ace and me*), 2013

Fig.17, Reenactment (*Chatting*), 2013

Fig.18, Reenactment (*New Year*), 2013

Fig.19, Reenactment (*Countryside*), 2013

Fig.20, Reenactment (*Selfie 1*), 2013
Fig.21, Reenactment (*Selfie 2*), 2013

In Greek mythology, Echo, in love with Narcissus, was punished by the goddess Juno, and her punishment was to have to mimic others. Deprived of her own voice and in love with someone who could only love his own reflected image, Echo is doubly cursed. In reenactment there is a story of relation to others, sharing a photograph on the social network is about assimilation and a relation to the other existing 'friends' on the social web. We unconsciously repeat images, we are captured in mimesis and pattern in the same way Echo was trapped by the words of others.[22] These kinds of echoed reenactments can be about fitting in or conforming in the exposed, public, virtual sphere. In this society sharing a photograph is a narcissist self-involved action, while at the same time it is echoing what is on trend and *in*.

For Jennifer Allen, collective memory does not originate in the actual event, but rather in the way we re-present and share it.[23] Drawing on this research, by performing the reenactment and insertion of myself, I transform personal memory/moment into a new, mutual, collective and shared moment. The act of sharing takes the private into the public sphere, where a community of viewers judge and change it by likes, comments and additional shares, creating another shared moment or memory.

Do recreated images expose more meaning than the original photographs on which they are based? And what value is added to the image by the act of reenactment?

22 Ovid, Ovid Metamorphoses, trans. Rolfe Humphries, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955, p. 68

23 Jennifer Allen, "Tell Tales: How Memory Has Changed", Frieze Magazine, 2011, http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/tell-tales, (accessed 1 March 2013)

4.2/ Tag Mee

Sophie Calle's work blends the personal and the fictional, the real and fake, and raises the question as to where autobiography ends and fiction begins. Her work performs this double meaning: she is a storyteller and yet always a part of the story. In the series *Detective* (1980) Calle hired a private detective to follow her around town for a day and photograph his surveillance. She then follows him following her, taking photographs of his pursuit. This act resembles in certain expects the public social sharing or reenactment; there also the user is both the storyteller and a part of the story.
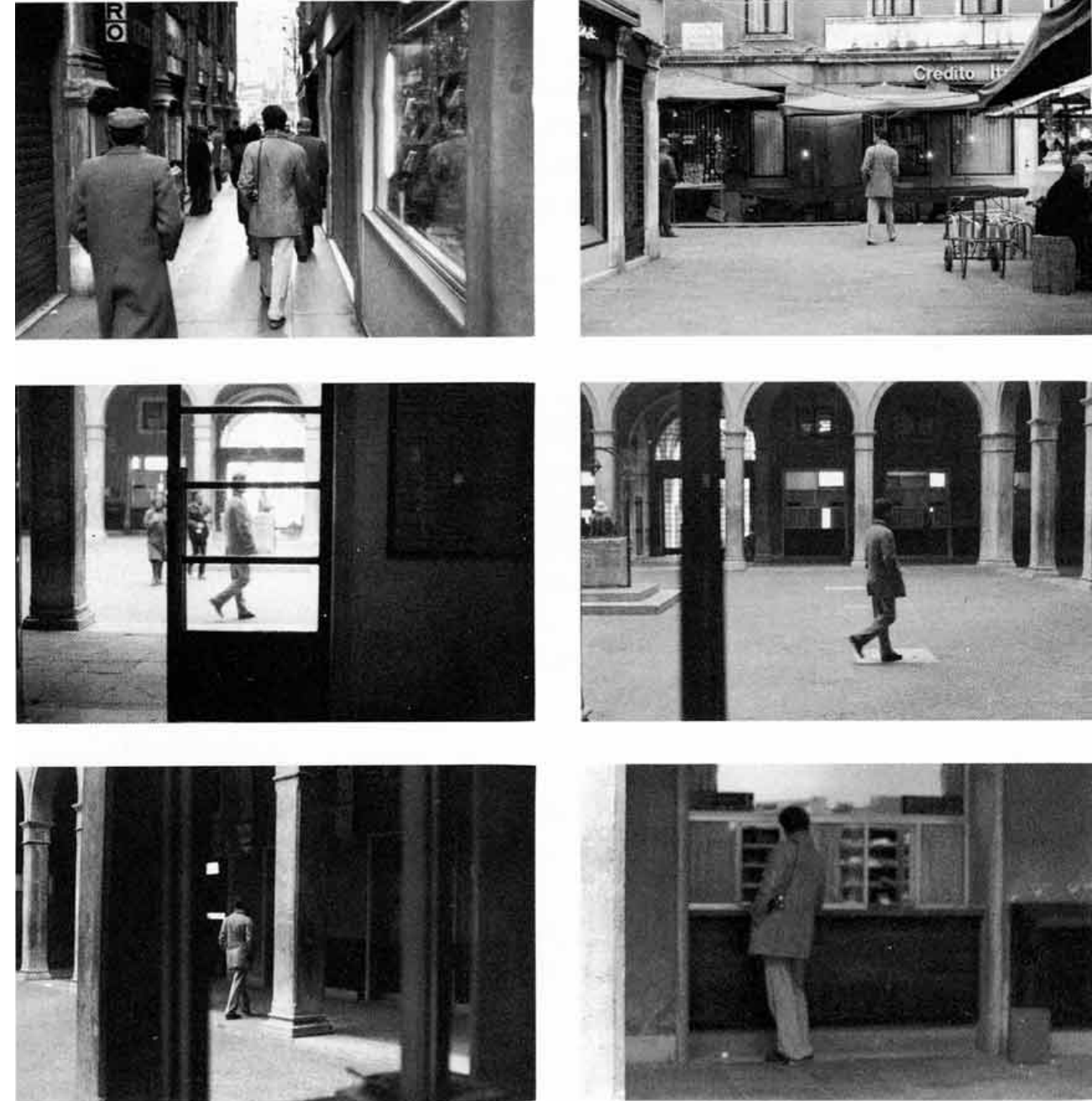

Fig.22, Sophie Calle, *Detective*, 1980, black-and-white photograph

The next step in my working process was to upload the images I had reenacted onto Facebook. Like Calle, I mixed the fictional with the 'real' to create a new profile named 'Tag Mee'. Like Echo, this character is passive. I created a profile made of the found images and titles I had collected and then reenacted from Facebook. 'Tag Mee' tags herself in other people's moments and then tags them back in the reenactments. Her only status is *'Lets play a game, you tag me and I'll do the same…'* It was important to make a dedicated Facebook profile for this project and keep it separate from my personal profile in order to examine the act of tagging and sharing from a neutral place, using Facebook as a blank canvas. At first there were no responses. However, as the reenactments were uploaded and tagged, people started to tag 'Tag Mee' in their own photographs for her to mimic, reiterating an act of seeing and being re-seen before they are erased and forgotten by the viewers by the next image.

Fig.23, Print Screen from 'Tag Mee' Facebook home page, 2013

Fig.24, *A Couple*, from 'Tag Mee', 2013
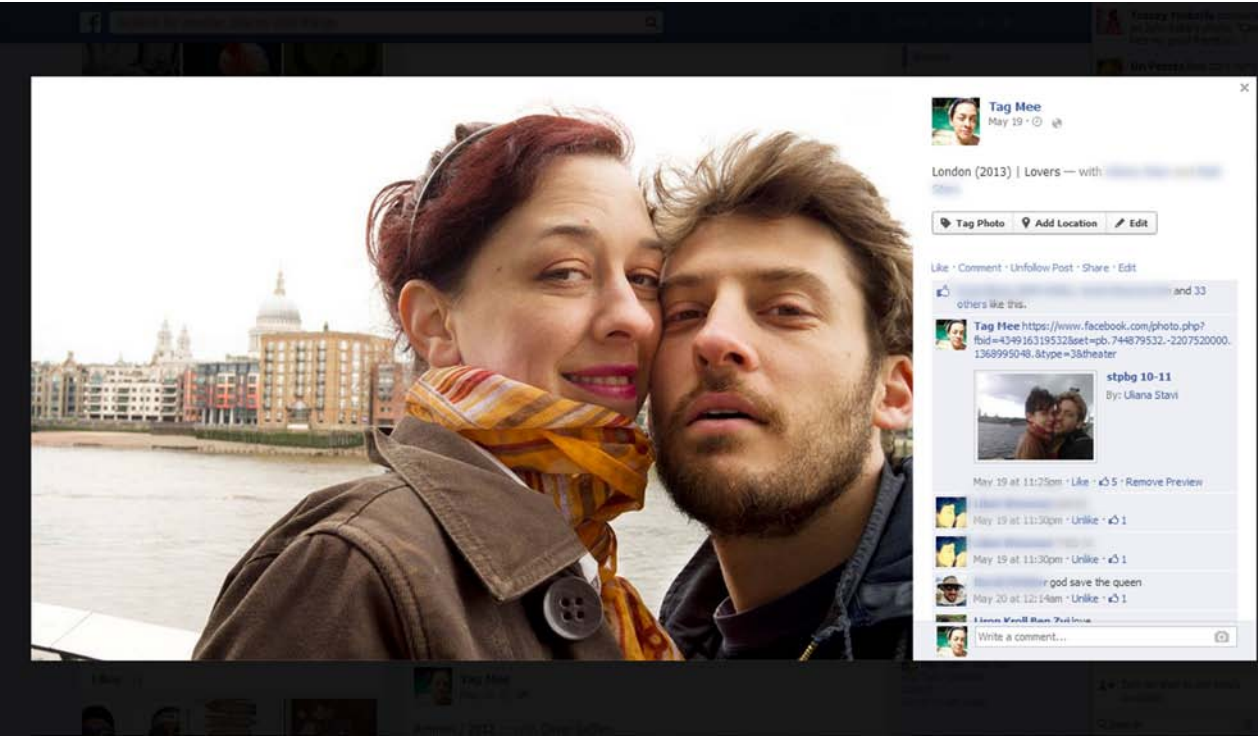
Fig.25, Reenactment (*London 2013*| *The Lovers*), 2013

Here the identity of the characters is emphasized and manipulated via text and tagging. The images where users tagged 'Tag Mee' were related to their own private associations, and were important to them, they wanted "Tag Mee" to draw other people's attention to these associations and relations. While many of the images Tag Mee was involved in were irrelevant, stupid or obscene, some were beautiful moments in everyday life that were shared.

Here are some examples with their original captions:

Man & his horn ....jpg

Bootleg club.jpg

Fig.26, *Man & his horn…*, from 'Tag Mee', 2013
Fig.27, *Bootleg Club*, from 'Tag Mee', 2013

Twins (no .1).jpg

Limbo Girls.jpg

Fig.28, *Twins (no. 1)*, from 'Tag Mee', 2013
Fig.29, *Limbo Girls*, from 'Tag Mee', 2013

The Most Beautiful Girls In
The World .jpg

Fig.30, *The Most Beautiful Girls In The World*, from 'Tag Mee', 2013

5/ Intimacy in Reenacted Photographs

5.1/ Intimacy and Authenticity in Reenactments

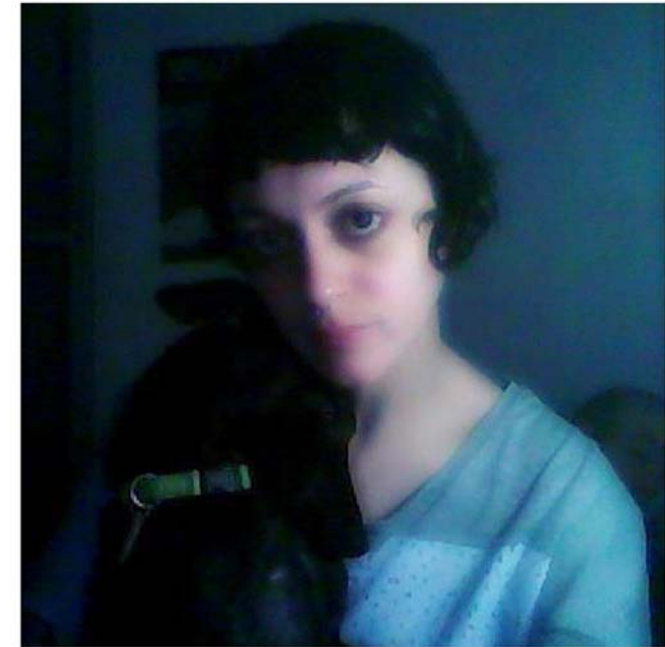In Paul Knight's series *Constructed Scenes* (2006-2007), he takes and mixes images from generic, familiar images like popular images, pornography and art history. Then he reenacts these domestic, sexual and frank scenes in a studio setting.[24] The restaged photographs seem unnatural, cold, very clean, refined, and perhaps even somewhat sterile. Knight's act of displacement lends his photographs an almost repulsive quality, transported to the studio, these otherwise intimate situations leave viewers feeling somewhat uncomfortable, as if seeing something not meant for their eyes. The images seem to have lost their original source of authenticity and real intimacy.

Fig.31, Paul Knight, *Untitled*, C-Type photograph, 2006

24 http://www.paulknight.com.au/constructed-scenes, (accessed 28 February 2013).

The exhibition *Making it up: Photographic Fictions* (2013-2014) at the *Victoria & Albert Museum*,[25] dealt with the fictional and fictitious aspect of photographic images. Presenting works by photographers working in the 19th century and up to the current day, the exhibition showed the preoccupation with storytelling has always been major concern of this seemingly realistic medium. In contrary to the once wide held assumption that photographs present or deliver an accurate testimony of reality, in other words, that photographs do not lie, the works exhibited show how influential other narratives forms, such as literature, film, painting, and theater, as well as other photographs were and continue to be, on photography. Hannah Starkey's *Untitled - May 1997*, shows two girls, one is passed-out laying on her friend's hip, looking relaxed and comfortable, while her friend looks at her in an uneasy position, the gestures of their hands and body are convincing, they seem close, it might be because they seem similar and about the same age and style, their bond looks intimate, real and even with sexual tension. Yet, the neat and organized composition and uptight frame, reveals the fiction of the scene.

If in Knight's work, real intimacy under the clinical studio lights and camera functions results in somewhat unappetizing images, Starkey's fictional intimacy serves a more palatable vehicle for latent passions and desires.

Fig.32, Hannah Starkey, *Untitled - May 1997*, Colour Photograph, 1997

25 Making it up: Photographic Fictions, Victoria & Albert Museum, London 3 May 2013 – 16 March 2014.

Moving to cinema for references, Vincent Gallo's 1998 film *Buffalo 66*, tells the story of a released convict who kidnaps a teenage student on the way to visit his parents, in order to present her to them as his girlfriend. He forces her to pretend they're in a loving intimate relationship.[26] This idea of forced or fake intimacy bothers me. Intimacy loses something of its authenticity when posted online. How is it that we might have come to believe the veracity of a shared or reenacted photograph in the social media? I used still frames from this film and other films to capture a sense of the intimate situation that existing in various types of relationships and relations.

Fig.33, *Buffalo '66*, dir: Vincent Gallo, 1998
Fig.34, *9 Songs*, dir: Michael Winterbottom, 2004

26 *Buffalo '66*, dir: Vincent Gallo, 1998

Fig.35, *Autumn Sonata*, dir: Ingmar Bergman, 1978

Sontag saw a photograph, its materiality, as an integral part of its context, the way we use it changes the way it is interpreted. The photograph itself is only a fragment of a larger moment. Its moral and emotional weight depends on where it is inserted.[27] Social networks impose a hegemony of images, a soft nudge toward conformity in order to belong to the group, while working at solitary computer, mobile phone or tablet screens. Sharing images on social networks multiplies them and sets them in various contexts that potentially have no ties or links with their original circumstances.

These notions are taken a step further in Sharon Lockhart's series *Auditions* (1994). In these works she reenacts a film's first kiss, with children trying to capture the moment before it. This scene is awkward because the children lend an anomalous element, yet this awkwardness emphasizes the border between 'fake' and 'real' intimacy in reenactments, by making it obvious.[28] In recreating a moment, it is fake, but it is real in so far as the subjects are about to kiss, the awkwardness is felt by both subject and viewer.

Fig.36, Sharon Lockhart, *Audition Two: Darija and Daniel*, ektacolor print, 1994

27 Sontag Susan, On Photography, London: Penguin Books, London, 2008, p. 105 - 106.
28 Daniel McDonald, "Sharon Lockhart", Frieze Magazine, 1995, http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/sharon_lockhart1/, (accessed 17 May 2013).

In Gillian Wearing's *Self Made* (2010), a group of teenagers are asked to perform a fight scene where one of them is being bullied by the others. Throughout the fight their actions are directed. The work shows clearly that staging and reenactment have the ability to create a new type of therapeutic or cathartic reality based on role-play. Reenactment brings forth real emotions, threats and fears despite the controlled setting. This indirectly creates a paradox between documentation and reenactment. While documentation is regarded as more authentic in its intimacy than staged reenactment, perhaps this is a question of notions of realism and the slightly different aesthetic between the document and social realism. Reenactment contains elements of both; in theatre gestures can be symbolic, creating emotional responses, whereas in life, emotions create the gestural expression of those feelings. In reenactment the gesture creates associated emotional responses.[29]

The repetitive nature of 'sharing' is popular because it emphasizes the known, the familiar, and the conformity required in social networks. In the same way, reenactment places the individual at a safe distance where their mistakes can work as therapeutic lessons in belonging.

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29 Daniel F. Herrmann, *Gillian Wearing*, London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2012, p. 39.

5.2/ Intimate Strangers

Fig. 37, *The Beloved Daughter*, 2013

Fig. 38, *The Girlfriend*, 2013

Fig. 39, *A Stranger in the Park*, 2013

This project attempts to manufacture a sense of intimacy between me and random strangers. I chose people from both my immediate environment and randomly in the streets, asking if I could take photographs with them. Later, I took photographs with them in their own personal spaces - their living rooms, bedrooms, bathrooms, back yards, and other locations infused with their personal memory. I told them to look at me, think about me, and remember me. The encounters were singular and short, yet they harboured a sense of infinite possibilities; a unique and magical moment overpowering every day, automated existence. In each encounter I staged an intimate moment, an artificial acquaintance in which I inserted myself. I was looking for intimacy within the estranged, occupying a contradictory position at once distant and involved, repulsed and attracted. This generated a sense of belonging and of loneliness, both of empathy and a struggle for domination. This structure enabled the creation of privacy everywhere and a sense of closeness with anyone; in a short period of time I created an industry of intimacy. For example, in Fig.39, I met a stranger in the park. I took a photograph with him because I liked the way he was dressed and how his red scarf matched my red boots. I put my medium format on a tripod and set-up the timer and asked him to look at me and put his hand on my shoulder. As the timer rewound, the second he put his arm around me, I wanted to bite my nails.

Fig. 40, *Sisters*, 2013

In Fig.40, I was sitting in a cafe and I invited the waitress to join me for dessert. While preparing the set for the photograph in Fig.40 when waiting for her, I was reminded of Hannah Starkey's photograph as seen in Fig.41, the kind of light in the cafe and the appearance of the waitress which tromped me unconsciously to echo her image.

The question about authenticity, intimacy and on the other side – artifice, remains open to the viewer to decide. For example, in Intimate Strangers, while some people think I was photographed with my father/lover, others see it as a staged image.

Fig. 41, Hannah Starkey, *Untitled - October 1998*, 1998

6/ Lost on the Ideal Vacation

6.1/ Reenactment of Stock Images

Martin Parr's photographs deal with mass tourism at popular attractions around the world. His touristic subjects are photographed visiting famous locations, posing in front of popular land marks and monuments. It is if they are trying to conquer these sites, announcing 'I was there'. In this photograph a tourist photographs a hot spot: a Gaudí ceramic lizard, like hundreds other of visitors, he took the same image of the same icon.[30]

Popular shared stock images show a similar pattern, they mimic notions of 'cool' within the group, and appropriate the fantasy.

Fig.42, Martin Parr, *Too Much Photography*, 2012, Colour Photograph

30 http://www.martinparr.com/2012/too-much-photography/, (accessed 20 July 2013)

6.2/ Love in Deauville

After investigating Facebook 'shared' images I started exploring generic stock images using Google. Travelling alone for a residency in Deauville, an apparently romantic place, for vacations and love affairs, it was a great opportunity to research the 'ideal' image; I began forming an image bank. Using Google and search words like 'Deauville', 'couples', and 'vacation', I amassed images advertising holiday locations, with couples and women enjoying vacations on the beach, at the swimming pool, and in gardens, and other romantic attractions associated with the area. People coming to relax from their everyday grind, wanting to escape their stressful lives in the city for a limited period.[31] The artist's residency at Deauville invites international photographers to fall in love with Deauville for 12 days and then leave. The idea of a woman having a love affair or adventure while on holiday attracted me in some way. The images I collected transmitted a utopian feeling of perfection, of ideal couples or individuals or groups.

Fig.43, Found Google image, (*Lover 1*), date unknown

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31 Ways of escape - new six part series examining the tourist business BBC2, 1.7.96, 50 minutes

Fig.44, Found Google image, (*The Bikini Girl 1*), 1959

Fig.45, Found Google image, (*Lover 2*), date unknown
Fig.46, Found Google image, (*The Bikini Girl 2*), May 29, 2010

I printed these images and studied them and they served as my starting point. When I arrived in Deauville I looked for the actual places in the images, and reenacted the ideal moments the couples and the women in the pictures seem to be having, whether alone, or with people. My project plan was to appropriate the locations, the 'ideal dream' holiday, with the 'ideal partner' in Deauville.
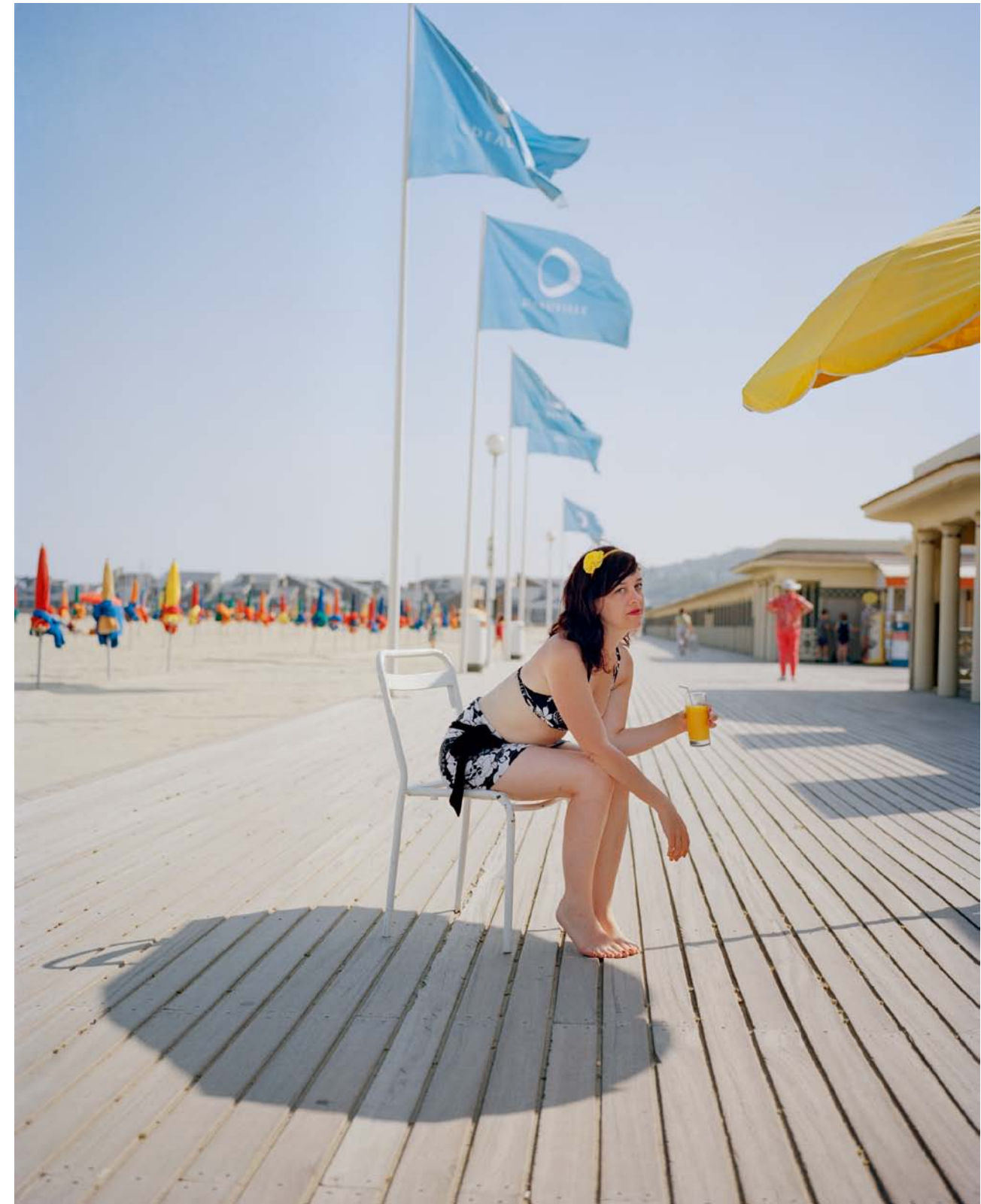

Fig.47, Reenactment (*Lover 1*), 2013

Fig.48, Reenactment (*The Bikini Girl 1*), 2013

Fig.49, Reenactment (*Lover 2*), 2013

Fig.50, Reenactment, (*The Bikini Girl 2*), 2013

Roland Barthes noted that the holiday is a 'recent social phenomenon'[32] for average working class people. Barthes differentiates these tourists from the *writer* who is not taking a vacation, but works all the time. So I am the *writer* in this research, the *photographer* and not the *tourist*.

Over the summer I had visited the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, where I saw an exhibition of immigrant photographers. The show, entitled *Displaced Visions,* included works by Robert Frank, Bill Brandt and other dislocated photographers. One quote by Brandt really highlighted the role of the photographer: 'It is part of the photographer's job to see more intensely than most people do. He must keep in him something of the receptiveness of the traveller who enters a strange country'.[33] This quote was placed near an image of a woman refugee arriving to Israel.

Fig.51, Walter Zadek, *Untitled*, black-and-white photograph, 1900-1992

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32 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), pp. 29-30

33 Displaced Visions Emigré Photographers of the 20th Century, the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 28 May 2013-29 September 2013.
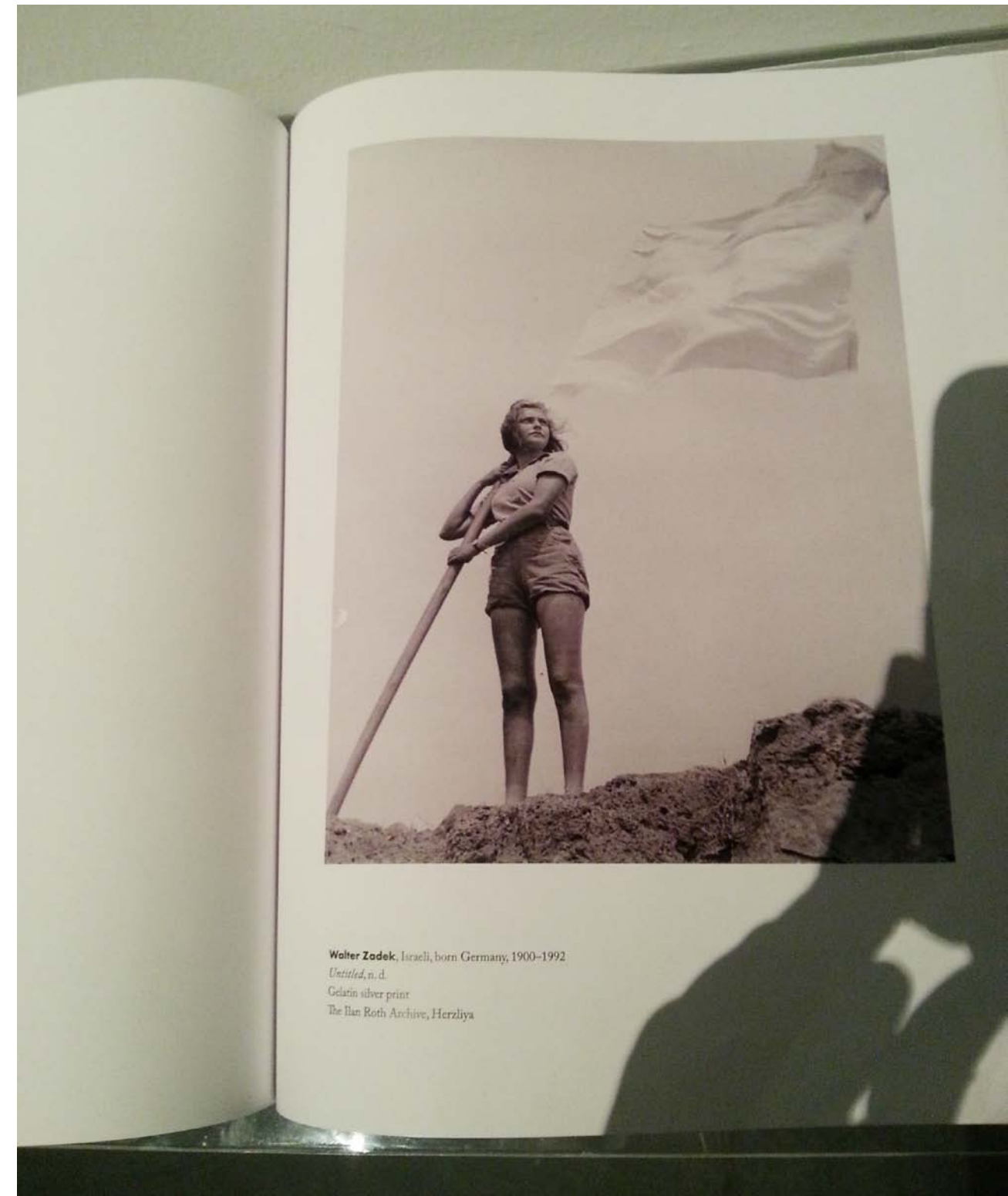
This raised questions about refugees, immigrants and the artifice of tourism and its ideals. I wanted to question the gap between bank images and photographic realism like Frank's or Brandt's. What is the gap between the ideal vacation image and the 'real' location? In *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and travel in Contemporary Societies*, John Urry describes Niagara Falls as a cliché that only exists in images that bear little resemblance to the object itself.[34] This evokes a sense of the link between the symbolic and the real. In this sense reenactment – in my own work, and that of others quoted here – is the gap that opens between the moment of the reenacted image what it can symbolize, and the real events surrounding the reenactment. While the moment can be seen as 'organic' because it is actually happening, the symbolic possibilities are to some extent artificial. This is because the event is created or based upon imagined situations acted out by models in the service of commercial interests. This tension, which is inherent in almost every photographic image by definition, takes on a complex dimension in photographs of idealized moments, where people seem to be 'having the time of their lives'.

34 John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and travel in Contemporary Societies*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1990, p.62,66.

7/ conclusion

The nostalgia of the family album and its materiality, its function as the generator of memory and of physical closeness has been replaced by a very different notion of sharing on social networks. The 'popular' image serves as a meme for a conformity of virtual networks that has dislocated the image itself and the intimacy Barthes saw in the photograph with its *memento mori* qualities. Reenactment may or may not be the inevitable outcome of postmodern irony and citation, or an extension of disembodied virtual images that lack a tactile reality. Realism has often been associated with socialism, and 21st century capitalism is perhaps dealing in virtual brainwashing via ideal images and broken intimacy.

According to Jean Baudrillard humans in capitalist societies, especially postmodern societies, have replaced real ties and connections with symbols and signs. As a result, people experience the simulacra of reality instead of reality itself. This 'precession of simulacra',[35] that Baudrillard sees in historical terms, has brought late capitalist societies to an unprecedented suspension of differences and distinctions between reality and representations of the world. Mass media, including social networks, the prime vehicle of contemporary signs and symbols, constructs a 'perceived reality' that reconstructs real social structures. In this context Facebook can be seen as a capitalist conglomerate that creates its own self-serving consumer market. In Baudrillard's view, the mutual dependency between representations and individual subjects leads to an obliteration of the Other, who is now conceived of in subjective rather than objective terms. This situation impacts people's emotional and spiritual lives as they are now confined to simulacras instead of real experiences. While Baudrillard sees postmodernist societies as ones in which personal freedom is limited and guided by capitalistic needs, Eva Illouz offers a different view. In her book *Cold Intimacies, Emotions and Late Capitalism* (2008), Illouz claims that capitalist society generated a new

culture of subjective feelings and desires. The active emotional participation of an ever-increasing number of individuals relying on mass consumption in many areas of their lives is necessary for capitalism to thrive. According to her view, all kinds of social networks use the subject's imagination and exchange the real experience with emotions that might have been. They remove the physical body from the real social connection, and gain psychological and textual character via Facebook. This employs the power of imagination that depends on real feelings, emotions and moods. Illouz claims Internet images create an after-effect of disappointment, and, living our lives as emotional consumers in capitalism, leads to the consumption of second-hand sensations.[36] These, she contends, are substitutes created or even manufactured by a big 'Engulf & Devour'[37] conglomerate, such as Facebook, leaving us starved and lacking. An image is just an image and it is never satisfying. In Deauville, there is no love story that might have been, just an image, and through reenactment and my research I tell the story behind the disappointing, generic image, and I believe I turn it into an emotional story, a real and satisfying experience.

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35 Jean Baudrillard, trans. Sheila, Glaser, *Simulacra And Simulation*, U.S: The University of Michigan Press, 1994, p.1.

36 Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies, Emotions and Late Capitalism*, Hakibbutz Hameuchad: Publishing house Ltd. 2008, p. 136-143.

37 Engulf & Devour is the monstrous conglomerate in *Silent Movie*, Mel Brooks, 1976.

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