

Through the Years

Friday 6 December 2019 (10:30am - 16:00pm)

Waterside 2, Watershed, Bristol



Contemplation Time: A Document of Maternity Leave, Lena Simic, 2007-8

Introduction

The Family Ties Network (FTN) and Visual Culture Research Group (University of the West of England, Bristol) present a joint symposium on inter-generational identity focusing on recent film and photographic practice. The day features presentations by FTN coordinator Nicky Bird, Clare Johnson (UWE), FTN coordinator Rosy Martin, and Aaron Schuman (UWE). The panel discussion will be chaired by FTN founder and coordinator Sally Waterman.

The Family Ties Network is a research group of artists, filmmakers and writers who explore memory, space, place and the family in photography and moving image. They are interested in and investigate a range of issues, encompassing the visual representation of family memories, the family album, oral history, bereavement, displacement, estrangement and the family home.

familytiesnetwork.wordpress.com

The Visual Culture Research Group (VCRG) is a group of cross-disciplinary art and design practitioners, historians and theorists interested in visuality and visual culture. Its purpose is to generate new knowledge and innovative methodologies by putting practitioners into conversation with writers. Much of their work critically explores the relationship between 'making' and 'thinking', practice and theory and there is an overarching concern with challenging cultural representations of under-represented groups.

vcrg.co.uk

Schedule

10.30 ARRIVAL/REGISTRATION (tea/coffee and biscuits)

11.00 Welcome (Clare Johnson and Suze Adams)

11.10 Clare Johnson (UWE)

11.40 Nicky Bird (FTN)

12.10 LUNCH: student folios: review/feedback

13.30 Rosy Martin (FTN)

14.00 Aaron Schuman (UWE)

14.30 Break (tea/coffee and biscuits)

15.00 Panel Q&A/discussion and open debate chaired by Sally Waterman (FTN)

16.00 CLOSE

Clare Johnson

Maternal Art and Post-Natal Wellbeing: proximity and separation in Lena Simic's *Contemplation Time* (2007-8) and Eti Wade's *Jocasta* (2008)

This presentation discusses inter-generational identity through two photographic artworks that challenge popular narratives of failed or achieved maternal femininity: Lena Simic's *Contemplation Time: a Document of Maternity Leave* (2007-8) and Eti Wade's *Jocasta* (2008). My readings of the artworks are informed by interviews with six women in their first year of motherhood. I am interested in the ways in which these artworks articulate complex maternal relations and their potential to be used to increase the wellbeing of first-time mothers. The presentation includes discussion of the research method and proposes 'empathic affirmation' as an extension to previous work on interviewing mothers. An overriding concern has been to write the embodied experience of mothers back into readings of artworks that speak in their name. With this in mind the responses of my participants provide the backbone to my analysis of the artworks and why they matter to discourses of maternal subjectivity.

Clare Johnson leads UWE's Visual Culture Research Group, which is a group of cross-disciplinary art and design practitioners, historians and theorists interested in visuality and visual culture (www.vcrg.co.uk). Her primary research interests are feminist approaches to art history, inter-generational approaches to contemporary art and visual culture, and maternal representations. She has published on the work of Tracey Emin, Vanessa Beecroft, Eleanor Antin, Carolee Schneemann, Yoko Ono, Marina Abramovic, Megan Marsh-McGlone, Eti Wade and Lena Simic amongst others. Clare is Associate Professor (Art & Design) at UWE and is a member of the Editorial Board for the *Journal of Gender Studies*.

people.uwe.ac.uk/Person/ClareJohnson

Nicky Bird

An ongoing case - Shadowing Rogovin: Retracing Family of Miners, Scotland 1982

My contribution will discuss a project currently in development, in which the role of contemporary photography, and other kinds of art-related outcomes, are yet to be determined. However, by focusing on the current research process, I will discuss the key issues that are emerging from looking back, revisiting and retracing a specific series of photographs made in 1982, with people who have particular connection to the photographs' subject matter.

In 2018, I viewed un-digitalised letters, photographic contact sheets and prints of the American photographer Milton Rogovin (1909-2011) in the Library of Congress, Washington. A social documentary photographer, whose work is often discussed in the tradition of Lewis Hine et al, Rogovin departed from objective approaches by creating portraits 'showing these people as workers, members of a family' (Rogovin, 1985). His photographic method was to make two portraits of a miner: one at work, the other at home. Names and locations were provided, having negotiated access through the National Union of Miners (Scotland). His 'Family of Miners' (1981-1987) took place in the USA, the USSR, Mexico and Scotland. A number of his photographs are now in the National Galleries of Scotland collection.

Rogovin travelled through the Scottish Coalfields for three weeks in 1982. He shot 61 rolls of medium format film, producing his series of portrait photographs of miners, their families and wider community activities. Following my Library of Congress visit, and with specific attention to his contact sheets, I have been retracing his steps, meeting people who have put names to faces and places. Details within images, easily overlooked by outsiders, hold significant – sometimes politically inspired – meanings that move between the past to the present. This is building up a picture not only of the photographer's visit to Scotland, but also a complex contemporary picture of communities, people, place – and politics - prompted by his contact sheets. Within two years of Families of Miners, Scotland 1982 the miners' strike (1984-85) to stop pit closures took place. Over 30 years later, the cultural and physical landscape of his photographs has dramatically changed. Ongoing legacies (of the strike and consequent pit closures) means responses to Rogovin's photographs range from fatigue to desires to preserve a distinct heritage or to address overlooked narratives.

Therefore, while Shadowing Rogovin has much in common with previous projects of mine, where the processes of looking back, revisiting, retracing and identification bring specific memories, histories and ways forward for final artworks, in this case, the latter is only just emerging. This is in a context where a loaded history, still within living memory, means that naming names can be contentious. As Martha Langford (2008) suggests, photographs not only have parts of lives already lived, but lives are continuing to be lived. For me, ethical questions (such as the gaps and ambiguities of ownership, permissions, consent related to the original images) come into sharp focus, with two other central questions: what is the role of the contemporary photographic artist and what kinds of artworks can be realised within this context and at this point in time?

Nicky Bird is an artist whose work considers contemporary relevances of 'found' photographs and latent histories of specific sites, investigating how they remain resonant. She is interested in a key question: What is our relationship to the past, and what is the value we ascribe to it? Her work incorporates new photography with oral histories and collaborations with people who have significant connections to the original site and its photographic archive. Alongside commissioned projects she has exhibited nationally and internationally, with published essays on themes of erased place and digital exchange of photographs. Nicky is also a Reader in Contemporary Photographic Practice at The Glasgow School of Art.

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Rosy Martin

Loss, reparation and new collaborations

To try to make visible what it meant, and how it felt, to be my Mother's carer as her dementia took hold, I worked with Verity Welstead to reconnect to those complex, myriad, conflicting ambivalent emotions. Taking a more distant view upon loss, I worked with Seija Ulkuniemi in the Northern Finnish landscape. We were both exploring grief, so there was deep empathy and connection between us. The late evening light in Lapland, this land beyond the Arctic circle, and a lake provided the quietude and stillness for such immersion in emotion. Currently I am working again with Verity Welstead, reappraising ageing in a playful yet challenging way. Ageing is the one aspect of diversity most people forget to address and yet it is for all of us, if we are lucky, one we will occupy. Consequently, I think it is important to address and contest the prejudices and negativity that surround this stage of life.

Rosy Martin is an artist-photographer, psychological-therapist, workshop leader, lecturer and writer. She explores the relationships between photography, memory, identities and unconscious processes using self-portraiture, still life photography, digital imaging and video. From 1983, with Jo Spence, she pioneered re-enactment phototherapy. Her work has explored issues including gender, sexualities, ageing, class, memory, urbanism, location, family dynamics, mother-daughter and father-daughter relationships, health, disease, bereavement, grief, loss and reparation. She has exhibited internationally since 1985, including Photographers Gallery, London (1987), Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography (1991), Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago (1991 & 1994), Focal Point Gallery, Southend-on-Sea (2001), Peri Gallery Turku (2004), Documenta 12, Kassel, Germany (2007) Durham Art Gallery (2010), Peltz Gallery (2014), Tate Britain (2015-6) and Wellcome Trust (2019-20). Rosy lives and works in London.

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Aaron Schuman

FOLK

In 1878, Aaron Schuman's great-grandfather, Franciszek Feret, was born approximately 150km east of Krakow – in the small village of Cierpisz – in a region then known as Galicia. In 1900, at the age of 22, "Frank" (as Schuman's family calls him) emigrated to the United States.

Schuman never met his ancestor, and before visiting the Ethnographic Museum in Krakow the artist and curator's personal connection to Polish customs and traditions was limited to a few old recipes and several family heirlooms, which had been passed down to him through the generations. Yet during his visits to the museum, its storage facilities, its archives and its curators throughout 2014, Schuman discovered many things that were at once vaguely familiar and exotically foreign; distant and unknown objects that seemingly possessed subtle echoes, hints, and traces of memories lost, interrupted, rediscovered, ordered and created anew.

In FOLK, Schuman explores the Ethnographic Museum in Krakow – its collections and exhibits, as well as its own distinct customs and culture – via his own personal history. In one sense, the exhibition focuses specifically on the regional and cultural heritage of the artist's forefathers, but equally considers the ways in which it has been collected, preserved, archived and represented via the field of ethnography, and within the Ethnographic Museum itself. Schuman's family history plays an important role here, but the exhibition is at the same time an examination of the Ethnographic Museum's own traditions, history, artifacts, and practices over the course of the last century. FOLK represents a story of curiosity, self-discovery and the forging of both history and memory; personal narrative is interwoven with preservation and documentation, as Schuman wholeheartedly embraces the museum's stated mission, as "a centre of reflection and understanding, of both ourselves and others".

Aaron Schuman is an American artist, photographer, writer, and curator based in the United Kingdom. Schuman received a BFA in Photography and History of Art from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts in 1999, and an MA in Humanities and Cultural Studies from the London Consortium in 2003. Schuman's photographic work is exhibited and published internationally – most recently at galleries such as Hauser & Wirth (Somerset) and Christie's (London / New York), and in magazines such as Foam, Hotshoe, and The British Journal of Photography – and is held in a number of public and private collections. He is the author of FOLK (NB Books, 2016) – which was cited as one of 2016's "Best Photobooks" by Alec Soth (Photo-Eye), Sean O'Hagan (The Guardian), and Jason Fulford (TIME), and long-listed for the Deutsche Börse Photography Prize 2017. In addition to his own photographic work, Schuman has contributed texts to many books including Aperture Conversations: 1985 to the Present (2018), Another Kind of Life: Photography on the Margins (2018), George Rodger: Nuba & Latuka—The Colour Photographs (2017), Alec Soth: Gathered Leaves (2015), Vision Anew (2015), The Photographer's Playbook (2014) and Storyteller: The Photographs of Duane Michals (2014), amongst many others; he also regularly writes for magazines such as Aperture, Foam, Frieze, TIME, Hotshoe, The British Journal of Photography and more. Additionally, Schuman has curated several major exhibitions, including Indivisible: New American Documents - Gregory Halpern, Sam Contis, Bayete Ross Smith (FOMU Antwerp, 2016), In Appropriation (Houston Center of Photography, 2012), Other I: Alec Soth, WassinkLundgren, Viviane Sassen (Hotshoe London, 2011), and Whatever Was Splendid: New American Photographs (FotoFest, 2010). In 2014, Schuman served as Chief Curator of Krakow Photomonth 2014 – entitled Re:Search, the main programme featured exhibitions by Taryn Simon, Trevor Paglen, David Company / Walker Evans, Clare Strand, Eyal Weizman, Jason Fulford and more. In 2018, Schuman also served as Curator of JaipurPhoto Festival 2018. His most recent monograph, SLANT, is published by MACK (2019). Schuman was the founder and editor of SeeSaw Magazine (2004-2014, www.seesawmagazine.com), and is Programme Leader of MA Photography at the University of the West of England (UWE, Bristol).

