the *affect* of images

by Sam Hopple

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What is grief, if not love persevering?[1]

preface: family album

I couldn't have been more than six or seven when I found it. I had been rummaging through my grandmother's file cabinet drawers whenever she ran out to the store, or cooked a meal for my sister and me in the kitchen. Among the disheveled stacks of old family photographs, I came across a newspaper clipping from 1991, *The Chaffee County Times;* a faded article with text, and a picture of our family. We are in the sitting room at our first home: my sister, six years my senior, and I donning matching white straw hats and blue and white sailor dresses. I am on my mother's lap, sitting askew as any restless one and a half year-old would on picture day. My father sits next to my mother and my sister stands close to him, on the righthand side. This was the last portrait taken of us as a complete family unit.

My wide-eyed self is smart, and I have known how to read for a while. My eyes skim the headline, *Hopple Parents Die After Drunk Driving Accident: Children Survive.* I didn't read further. I knew my parents were gone, but stumbling across this article was the first time I learned how it happened. I felt my throat tighten, and the back of my eyes start to burn: holding it in, the tears did not fall. In Susan Sontag's Regarding the Pain of Others, she references Virginia Woolf's anti-war commentary *Three Guineas* where Woolf writes, "the eye is connected with the brain; the brain with the nervous system. That system sends its messages in a flash through every past memory and present feeling." From this example, Sontag elaborates on the photograph as being: "both objective record and personal testimony, both a faithful copy or transcription of an actual moment of reality and an interpretation of that reality."[2] The physical reaction to both image and text I felt in my body was my first recognition of affect, which I have come to know as that indescribable thing, before the emotion identifies itself. I became unsettled that my family photograph no longer belonged to me, having been published, and was now a source of public opinion. This invoked feelings of shame and hurt that lingered throughout my childhood and adolescence.

Philosopher Jan Slaby defines affective states as, "the switch point, so to speak—the point at which awareness of situation ("threat over there!") is phasing over into active situation access ("flight or

fight")...emotions are responses to what matters—to what is grasped as immediately significant. Affective responses consist of a felt pressure or pull to act on behalf of whatever is grasped as important in an emotional state.[3] In *Camera Lucida,* Roland Barthes uses affect as a lens for approaching a photograph, his method of analysis being that of "affective intentionality," or looking with emotion.[4] While viewing an image of his recently deceased mother as a child, Barthes defines two standout terms related to the affective reading of images: The *studium* and the *punctum. Studium* relates to the cultural and educational context in which the image fits, and the curiosity around it in a broader sense. The *punctum* is what pierces and wounds, it is the 'taken-aback-ness' that allows photographs to be interpreted subjectively, personally.[5] The faded newspaper clipping was my punctum.

My family never talked about it much, the accident, likely to protect me from emotional distress surrounding such a tragic happening. As an adult, I recognize it was an incredibly painful navigation for my immediate and extended family, and they weren't well versed in discussing such things in great depth. Therapy was not a very well accepted tool in my family at the time, or really, anytime, and my habit of 'image snooping' continued as a coping mechanism for piecing together my own identity. I remember taking shoe boxes of images from my grandmother's closet into the bathroom, my safe space, shuffling through them carefully, as if they were evidence. I thought if I could look at the photographs enough, I could figure out who I was, where I came from: and in some aspects, I was right.

I could trace back my family history, memorizing black and white prints of my mother as a little girl, images that my father had taken of the English countryside where my parents had lived before having children, my own baby pictures. These images were not organized well. They were not in albums, neatly ordered chronologically. Black and white Polaroids from my grandmother's childhood were mixed with colour images of my own, taken with disposable cameras. Annette Kuhn writes that: "Photographs are evidence, after all...evidence in that sense: to be solved, like a riddle, read and decoded, like clues left behind at the scene of a crime. Evidence of this sort, though, can conceal, even as it purports to reveal, what it is evidence of... In all this, the images figures largely as a trace, a clue:

necessary, but not sufficient, to the activity of meaning-making; always signaling somewhere else."[6] While decoding this photographic family archive, I acted as a detective seeking to build memories I was too young to remember, and my imagination was beginning to fabricate a narrative of its own.

After the accident, our small rural town of Buena Vista, Colorado had lost dear friends and community members, and my sister and I were what was left; incomplete parts of something once whole, and we also became walking reminders of a painful tragedy. Throughout my adolescence, these community members would see me and sometimes they'd begin to cry saying, "You look so much like..." This made me feel uncomfortable, though their intentions were good-natured. I think of the photograph in relation to familial resemblance. Because I was so young when the accident happened, I didn't have memories of my own to reference my parents. The photograph was the only space in which I could analyze the resemblances that those who knew them could recognize in real time. Marianne Hirsch discusses resemblance in her book *Family Frames,* describing a close reading of an image of her grandmother and her mother as a young woman and girl, relating to the concept of recognition. "Through this familial look I define a boundary between inside and outside, claiming these women as a part of the story through which I construct myself...It is fundamentally an interpretive and narrative gesture, a fabrication out of available pieces that acknowledges the fragmentary nature of the autobiographical act and its ambiguous relation to reference. Photographs are fragments of stories..."[7] Hirsch, like Barthes, was attempting to reconcile a complex relationship between herself and her mother by seeking the familiar in order to resolve the past. This process is highly subjective as the individual is the only one who can make these connections to the photograph in relation to personal history. And for me, without memories of my own, the images found in my grandmother's file cabinet, paired with the stories people told me, were the fragments I had to weave myself and my history together. Despite being raised with the strength of my grandmother and surrounding myself with a non-biological chosen family, I am still learning what it means to be a daughter.

By returning to my family photograph, I am beginning to understand that the familial role of *daughter* is an unflinching part of my identity. Photographs are visual records that confirm who we are and who we used to be, and the camera is a powerful apparatus for explorations in therapeutic growth. In the early 1980's, British photographer Jo Spence and her collaborator Rosy Martin pioneered techniques of phototherapy in contemporary art practice.[8] Phototherapy is an area in psychology which functions as an investigative tool for healing by focusing on re-enactment, memory, trauma, grief, and time. Psychologist Judy Weiser says, "Phototherapy techniques use people's own personal snapshots, family albums, and photos taken by others (and the feelings, memories, thoughts, beliefs, and other information these evoke) to deepen and enhance their therapy process, in ways that words alone can not do."[9] My own experience with early childhood trauma has naturally attracted me to psychology, and I was interested in the intersectionality of art and psychology outside of the practice of 'art therapy.' I was excited that an image could hold the clues for something not yet recognized, and that healing could be found through the act of looking. I began to view figurative images differently during this time. I analyzed positionality, gaze, and other attributes related to body language, and this activity of looking critically led to an interest in curation as a career.

Working in an experimental format, this publication explores affect, emotional resonance, and the catharsis of making through varied photographic practices, looking deeply into the work of six contemporary photographers whose work centres around maternal exposures, self-portraiture, and childhood re-enactment. The selected works are thoughtful compositions that show how the body and the lens can work in tandem to successfully explore concepts of memory, identity, representation, parent/child relationships, vulnerability, and grief. Visual analysis and deeper contextualization of the images contribute to an engaging dialogue on the power of reframing the de/constructed and re/constructed image as a mechanism for healing and identity awareness. In placing these works together in an exhibition context that is intimate, this work also explores the labour of curatorial practice as a therapeutic tool for self-awareness and healing.

— Sam Hopple, Spring 2021

jo spence + rosy martin

In 1983, Jo Spence and Rosy Martin participated in a night course on co-counseling through the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), a continuing education scheme by the British Government to support people transitioning from school to the working world. "Co-counseling is a non-hierarchical, inexpensive way of training to discharge past hurts and griefs as well as being a two-way non-evaluative talking and listening contract between two people."[10] As the course progressed, they began co-counseling together, and in the third course, decided to incorporate the camera into their sessions, developing techniques of "re-enactment phototherapy." Their sessions used the family album to recount memories and identify past traumas as a starting place to re-contextualize, process, re-work, and accept one's circumstances in order to reach a place of resolution. "We take a specific piece of behaviour, history, or in this case an image, examine what we think it represents to us and how we would like to change...reframing is a kind of internal permission-giving: permission to change...It is not a way of discussing the 'real' in order to see if it is 'biased', but of finding new ways of perceiving the past so that we can change our activities now."[11] Being mentally prepared and self-aware are important attributes that must be present in the subject for phototherapy to be successfully executed. In other-words, if you are not at a place to identify what needs addressing internally, you won't be able to set up the visual component of the work.

Jo Spence and Rosy Martin
The old school, 1987
Photo: David Roberts

© Jo Spence Memorial Archive, Ryerson Image Centre
Courtesy of Rosy Martin

As defined by Martin, "Re-enactment phototherapy makes visible the performative body. The photography sessions are not about "capturing" the image, they are about seeking to make it happen—to "take place." It is about staging the selves and knowingly using visual languages, referring to and challenging other visual representations. It is about the constructions of identities rather than revealing any "essential" identity." [12] Martin and Spence's images are in essence staged portraits, produced through the performative act of regression. Similar to the theatre, the staging process requires certain direction in design elements like costumes and props. Approaching re-enactment from places of both curiosity and vulnerability, Spence and Martin alternated roles as actor and director to support one another in making the new images. Martin's father was a tailor, and dressing-up was a frequent part of her childhood. As an adult identifying as an out lesbian feminist, Martin thought about the masculinity and femininity of queer dress codes, and the societal expectations of gender and identity related to her personal style. Spence, wished to dive deep into her childhood trauma of living with absent parents after her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, while addressing her own frustrations with the healthcare system.[13] Life experiences are subjective, as noted by the pair's differences in upbringing. However, Martin and Spence's re-enactment techniques can be applied universally through individual tailoring.

The Old School is a portrait of Martin and Spence taken by David Roberts to accompany the text from their exhibition *Photographs in Context V: Jo Spence and Rosy Martin: Double Exposure, The Minefield of Memory,* which ran at The Photographers' Gallery in London from January 6–March 14, 1987.[14] The image gives the public a visual context to their practice of re-enactment.

The black and white portrait of Martin (L) and Spence (R), shows the two giggling and 'performing' as school girls, covering their mouths with their left hands in unison, and holding their primary school photographs with their right hands. They are grown women, not old, not young, but they are, in acting as children, radiating a childlike glee as they sport hairstyles, clothing and glasses of the 1980's. The school photographs were used in a co-counseling session to help process early childhood trauma, in this instance Spence's childhood experience with a terminally ill mother. "This apparently ordinary school photo turned out to be the sight/site of real traumas about rejection, unlovedness, responsibility, and the desire to perform and please as a child to obtain the missing love. What I wanted to come to terms with in this session was the powerlessness I felt around that period. This was also relevant to the powerlessness I was experiencing as a person who was potentially chronically or terminally ill with breast cancer, who had recently been totally traumatized in hospital, and who felt hostility and fear towards the medical profession." [15]

The image is not a re-enactment of the women as schoolgirls, but rather, a re-enactment of the emotional state of childhood innocence. By returning to this mental state, re-enactment techniques in photography could assist Spence in conjuring up important memories that required therapeutic intervention. This is the reward of re-enactment, that through regressive photographic practices one can identify and reach a place of self-awareness to process and begin to heal. Spence passed from breast cancer in 1992, but the portrait can also serve as evidence of the close bond she and Martin shared in their collaborative work together. The phototherapeutic techniques developed by Martin and Spence continue to influence images made by contemporary photographers unique to their artistic practices.

catherine opie

Photographs can reveal something that is ordinarily not visible, but that the gifted photographer brings it out through artistic and professional skills. We understand the portrait differently. It presents a range of possibilities, or subject positions, which are not forever fixed in silver, electronics or paint. These can be examined, played with, questioned, accepted, changed or discarded.

— *Rosy Martin & Jo Spence*[16]

Catherine Opie is well-known in contemporary photography, particularly for her work in queer portraiture. In the 1990's during the peak of the AIDS crisis, Opie gained notoriety in the field for her dignified portrayal of members in the Kink, Leather, and BDSM communities she was a part of. Her subjects, considered *outsiders* and often labelled *other,* were viewed by Opie as members of her 'Royal Family,' and her thoughtful methods of composing her photographs are evidence of this care.[17] She incorporates rich-coloured backgrounds and lighting techniques that emphasize the figure, similar to the way Renaissance painters did to highlight their upper-class subjects. Opie also considers the position of the figure, pulling from the art historical to mimic the portraiture styles and poses of the often-cited painter Hans Holbein the Younger. In *Feeling Photography* Dana Seitler comments that, "Renaissance painterly techniques, now rendered photographically in Opie's portraits, reemerge as part of a

Catherine Opie
Self Portrait / Nursing, 2004
C-print
40 x 32 inches
(101.6 x 81.3 cm)

© Catherine Opie
Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul

contemporary queer aesthetic."[18] Queer bodies are not well-documented in the canon of art history. Opie's professional practice and craft in image re-construction elevates her community to a place of reverence. Opie's practice is in essence, an act of community service.

That being said, it is a rarity for Opie to make self-portraits, and when she does, the intention is to honor her personal and artistic growth, and to serve as a reminder that she does not stand apart from the groups she documents in her work.[19] Three poignant images *Self Portrait / Cutting, Self Portrait / Pervert and Self Portrait / Nursing* stand out in the trajectory of her 20+ year career. In *Self Portrait / Cutting* (1993), Opie faces away from the camera, shirtless, sporting a partially dyed butch haircut and multiple silver hoop piercings in her ears and her right arm has a band tattoo. In Opie's back in the foreground, two stick figures in dresses holding hands have been carved into her skin. A house, a clouded sun, and two birds make up the background of the composition, similar to a child's drawing. The cuts are fresh, blood running down in various places, thickening the lines. The background is a dark green textile, staying consistent with her style of referencing the art historical.[20] In *Self Portrait / Pervert* (1994) Opie poses topless in front of a black and gold tapestry. She rests her clasped hands in her lap, fingers intertwined. Her arms are lined with small silver spikes, like nails, which pierce her skin in increments from her wrists to her shoulders. She is wearing a black leather mask used in Kink communities, covering her head and hiding her face completely. The word "pervert" is carved into her chest, with a freshness akin to that in *Self Portrait / Cutting.*[21] These are jarring images where Opie uses her body as a canvas as expressions of queer activism.

There is an important shift to be examined in *Self Portrait / Nursing,* made ten years later in 2004 after Opie became a mother. A rich, red tapestry adorned with gold motif hangs behind Opie as she sits, and poses shirtless, cradling and breastfeeding her one-year-old son who is also nude. True to Opie's style of sourcing art historical material, both their figurative positions and tender gazes nod to the iconography of the *Madonna and Child.* Her son is latched onto her right breast, looking up at her, while Opie holds her gaze downward as an attentive observer. Chronologically, we see it is the first time in Opie's self-portraiture that she lets the viewer see her face at all; yet unlike the subjects she photographs, the gaze is still not direct. Opie intentionally keeps herself from revealing too much, but still allows the viewer to witness this intimate moment between a mother and child. This is not dissimilar from the intimacy shown in Mary Cassatt's maternal paintings of the late 19th and early 20th century, created when the art movement shifted towards Impressionism, and modernized depictions of motherhood began to be shown through loose painterly gestures.[22] Ever so faintly, one can see the scars of *Pervert* now healed, forever etched into Opie's chest. The scar is a physical marker of identity that connects to Opie's past and present self, not losing sight of where she is rooted. Opie's work creates a new meaning in the present, that is informed by signifiers of the past. These signifiers pull from formal elements in portraiture reserved for those with a higher status, and Opie not only honors her subjects, but herself by placing them in her photographs. Spence and Martin say that the goal of phototherapy is to, "disrupt, replace, and rework" an image.[23] Catherine Opie disrupts the narrative of representation in art historical portraiture through symbolism and reframing, setting a precedent for more inclusivity in the field.

andrea jenkins wallace

The work of a photographer cannot help but be autobiographical. Every image produced has been seen by the photographer's eye and transmitted, by way of the photographer's hand... that is the prosthesis of memory.

— Luc Sante[24]

Andrea Jenkins Wallace
Familiar, 2012
Digital print

© Andrea Jenkins Wallace
Courtesy of the artist

Andrea Jenkins Wallace's *Familiar* is not a happy image. It un-eases, and exudes tension through the use of direct gaze, body position, and emotive stillness that connects with something deeply human, giving pause for introspection. *Familiar* is a constructed tryptic of Wallace, her young son, and her aging mother sitting in the same wooden, turquoise-blue chair in varied positions. The facial expressions the three redheads hold are stoic with a veil of pain, and their green eyes pierce through the frame with intensity. Wallace (L), sits with her hands on the chair armrests with her legs crossed, and she leans slightly left. The buttons on her black cardigan are askew, her necklace is off centre, and she wears a ring on her right hand. Her son is in the middle, slouching left towards Wallace, using his right arm to prop himself up. The fabric of his t-shirt wrinkles due to his position as do his blue floral print shorts. Wallace's mother (R) sits with her hands clasped, in a striped long sleeve shirt and black pants, skewing to the right. Her face is sullen and wrinkled, like the fabric of her shirt. The unmistakable resemblance in their features signifies the image as a multi-generational portrait, and we can infer by the cues in body language that this is a depiction of a strained familial relationship.

Familiar comes from a series called *Towards Amnesia,* a vulnerable body of work created by Wallace in a time of immense pain. She was a single mother who had just experienced a devastating break-up, and her mother had been diagnosed with dementia, a disease that distorts recognition and memory. In a virtual lecture presented by the Denver Art Museum, Wallace recounted the experience of returning to her home state of Massachusetts to move her mother to a care facility in Colorado. She speaks about packing up the home and discovering relics, such as jewelry and old photographs from her mothers' childhood. Citing a complex mother/daughter relationship, Wallace began the lecture with a black and white snapshot of her mother and her uncle as children about to go swimming, radiating pure joy. She explained that she frequently returns to the image to seek out that innocence and credits explorations of the family album as the impetus for her interest in photography.[25] Wallace's relationship to this image is similar to Roland Barthes, when he speaks on grieving and caring for his ailing mother in her later years. "...she had become my little girl, uniting me with that essential child she was in the photograph."[26] Wallace does not attempt to claim her mother as her own child, but rather recognizes a truth in the image, the essence of innocence as part of her mother's being. This innocence reveals itself as her mother's disease progresses, and shifting power dynamics allow Wallace to approach her work with less conflict.

Photography is a medium that allows for certain degrees of truth, and the photographer holds great power in revealing or concealing these truths. Ultimately, it is the person behind the lens who constructs what may or may not be real. By taking individual portraits of herself and each family member, and re-constructing them into a single image, Wallace has control of the narrative she presents. Marianne Hirsch writes, "Autobiography and self-portraiture share with photography a presumed referential basis and proximate relationship to truth which disguises their mediated and constructed qualities. The illusion of the self's wholeness and plenitude is perpetuated by the photographic medium as well as by the autobiographical act: both forms of misrecognition rest on a profound misprision of the processes of representation."[27] Wallace does not retreat in her practice to rewrite her own history, but photographs her truth directly in real-time with her camera. By making herself a subject in the work, Wallace shows strength through her willingness to be vulnerable. Confronting one's reality is a difficult task that involves emotional labour, and the act of photographing allows for a certain level of distancing. After a photograph is taken, it needs to be edited, and it is in this stage that Wallace can process her emotions simultaneously. This reflection period lets Wallace decide how she wants to remember these moments with her mother through creative control. In relation to who authors a photograph, Roland Barthes writes, "The portrait photograph is a closed field of forces...In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art."[28] Wallace's authentic approach to image making lets her thoughtfully consider all aspects of authorship. Family albums are held to depict subjective truth, and *Familiar* is universal in its emotional affect of fragile familial tension.

jess t. dugan

The enigma is that my body simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the "other side" of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for itself.

— Maurice Merleau-Ponty[29]

In 2005, Jess T. Dugan had chest reconstruction surgery to become more aligned with their gender identity. Starting again in 2010, Dugan has made an annual self-portrait with their mother in the series *Self-portrait with mom,* affirming their maternal bond, while also looking at how their bodies change over time. In an interview with *Musée Magazine,* Dugan reflects on getting teased at school during childhood for identifying as masculine, and how their mother supported them in this early stage of self-acceptance. "I got chased out of bathrooms. This heavily affected my identity today and the place where my artistic work comes from. My mom was supportive of me from the beginning. Having her treat me with enough dignity to even give me that choice at a young age was really important and validating."[30] This support Dugan discusses is shown in their series of images, and the transformations are both physical and emotional.

Jess T. Dugan
Self-portrait with mom, 2005, 2012, 2016 and 2020

© Jess T. Dugan
Courtesy of the artist

Beginning with *Self-portrait with mom,* 2005, a young Dugan is healing from their top surgery. In the black and white image, Dugan and their mother stand next to each other, shirtless. Their mother is on the left and Dugan is on the right, and they both stare directly into the camera. They both stand upright, as if they have just inhaled into a new chapter of the parent/child relationship. The incisions are still visible under the bandages on Dugan's chest and there is some bruising. Dugan appears comfortable in their new body though the wounds are fresh, and their mother's stiffened stance reads as protective. Dugan's face is slightly blurred, as they enter this new moment. As the series progresses, the portraits shift into colour, and the scars become less visible, showing the viewer the physical aspects of healing that begin to occur. In 2012, Dugan has a tattoo across their chest of two birds in flight, holding a banner in their beaks with the words, *every breath we drew was hallelujah.* The tattoo becomes more elaborate throughout the series, and each of them begins to exhale and relax through subtle shifts in dropped shoulders. Their mother's core strengthens, and she stands by Dugan throughout this ongoing transformation in a way that seems unshakeable in Dugan's use of the re-enacted pose.

Visibility is a key theme in these self-portraits and the camera is a companion for Dugan as a tool for invoking presence, and making space for themself as they physically enter into the body they have long identified with. *Self-portrait with mom* is also significant in its time-based nature, with a promise of the reoccurring image that will one day be an archive in Dugan's family album. Dugan's images are visual progressions of subtle self-awareness, and also a re-birth of sorts for both parent and child. The images are made in Dugan's gaze, and in making the collaborative portraits they are, "keeping both mother and child in view at the same time, [which] might enable us to demystify both childhood and maternity, seeing one as less fragile and the other as less omnipotent."[31] Dugan was eighteen when they first started the series, leaving childhood and approaching the work through the lens of an adult. Changes in the body come with age, but there are also invisible shifts in these images, where both parent and child come into their own.

Clarisse d'Arcimoles
In The Bath (My Mother And My Sister), 2009
Archival inkjet print
24.5 x 35 cm

© Clarisse d'Arcimoles
Courtesy of the artist

clarisse d'arcimoles

While a re-enactment may depend on historical documents and artifacts… the body remains the vehicle that can carry the past into the present, that can give the past presence.
— *Jennifer Allen*[32]

Un-Possible Retour, or 'a possible impossible return' is a body of work created in 2009 by French artist Clarisse d'Arcimoles as part of her MFA thesis work at Central St. Martins. It is a series of childhood re-enactments which uses her family photographs as reference points of the impossibility of going back in time. The images were made in her childhood home, which aided her success of meticulous staging. Members of d'Arcimoles' family re-created poses in the original photographs taken twenty years prior, evidenced by the orange timestamps in the lower right corner. "It's important I make the entire set to recreate an actual atmosphere so my family members can go back to their childhood." She notes that directing her family in getting the expressions correct was challenging saying, "every single detail is important and takes time to be checked carefully when comparing the two photos; the gap between young and old should not be visible. Thanks to this new way of observing details that I had never noticed before, I found interesting clues in the images."[33] The re-enactment and the original are displayed next to one another, allowing for immediate

comparison. The small scale of the images function as an invitation for the viewer to come closer, giving an intimate look at each family member's private moments as if flipping through their own family album. If the two images were separated and shown on their own accord, the intention would be lost and it would not be an 'affective' work. Time, memory, impossibility, and failure are explored throughout this thought-provoking series.

In The Bath (My Mother And My Sister) is a standout composition. The top image shows the artist's sister laughing in the bath as a little girl, gazing directly at the camera. Her mother sits in the opposite end of the tub, smiling and focused on her sister with a relaxed demeanor. The re-enactment is below, taken in the same bathtub, with very subtle changes to the scene itself. The biggest difference is an obvious jump in time. The little girl is now a grown woman, and the mother has reached middle age. Her mother's aging is less obvious, and is highlighted by a few grey hairs, and softened stomach and breasts. They both hold the same energy and expression to the original image, yet this accuracy does not lend itself to the physical possibility of returning to the past. d'Arcimoles acknowledges this failure in the work, stating, "A memory is never static, it changes as we grow, time becomes a creative space of evolution. In the comparison I unavoidably failed, we have to fail. There is no return into time."[34] d'Arcimoles' re-enactments are perhaps too accurate in their replication, and this perfection freezes time, and the subjects are stuck in the moment. d'Arcimoles' acknowledgement of this failure only leaves room for growth.

There are great lessons in failure in art, many of which are addressed in the aptly titled *Failure: Documents of Contemporary Art* produced by Whitechapel Gallery. In its introduction, Lisa Le Feuvre states, "Artists have long turned their attention to the unrealizability of the quest for perfection, or the open-endedness of experiment, using both dissatisfaction and error as means to rethink how we understand our place in the world. The inevitable gap between the intention and realization of an artwork makes failure impossible to avoid. This very condition of art-making makes failure central to the complexities of artistic practice and its resonance with the surrounding world."[35] *Un- Possible Retour* is reminiscent of Felix Gonzalez-Torres' *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* (1987–90), which is also referenced in the text as "an identical pair of battery-operated wall clocks, placed side by side, which inevitably will fail to keep the same time. The 'perfection' here lies in the failure of accuracy; anything else would be romantic fiction. Like these out-of-sync clocks, human beings are all fallible; perhaps this is most explicitly revealed to us in the ways that we understand the past through memory and imagination."[36] Considering the re-enacted images as out-of-sync clocks is a perfect metaphor for the difficulty of the return. One can regress in memory on an emotional level, but there is impossibility of a physical return to childhood. This is why the camera and the photograph are considered tools to explore this work, and are not perfect time machines. *Un-Possible Retour,* while unsuccessful in turning back time, is successful in its experimental exploration of memory, mortality, and family relationships.

chino otsuka

Chino Otsuka is a Japanese born photographer who left Japan at the age of ten to complete her studies in the United Kingdom. The duality of Otsuka's Eastern and Western heritage is reminiscent of the "Third Culture Kid", a term coined by US sociologist Ruth Hill Useem in the 1950's, for children who spend their formative years in places that are not their parents' homeland, a trend that has become more common with increased globalisation.[37] As a way to navigate these cultural differences, and to connect to memories of her childhood in Japan, Otsuka began a body of work titled *Imagine Finding Me,* which is now an artist's book. It is a striking publication in which the viewer sees Otsuka as both child and adult, in companion with one another. Creating this work from 2005–2009, Otsuka revisited childhood snapshots that evoked a sense of nostalgia and place, like family vacations to Paris or trips to the beach. In *Imagine Finding Me,* (1976 and 2005, Kamakura, Japan), Otsuka, as a little girl stands on the beach in a white polo shirt and a brown khaki jumper, wearing red socks and blue tennis shoes. Otsuka, as young woman stands next to her childlike self with a direct gaze, wearing a black shirt, denim skirt and tennis shoes. There are four figures in the background, all appearing to be children, playing in the sand. The sky is cloudy and the water is blue.

Chino Otsuka
Imagine Finding Me, 1976 and 2005
Kamakura, Japan
Digital Photograph

© Chino Otsuka
Courtesy of the artist

In the digital editing process, Otsuka super-imposes her adult-self convincingly into her childhood photographs, creating new juxtapositions for memory-work and self-rediscovery. Otsuka refers to the catharsis of digital manipulation as "a tool, almost like a time machine, as I'm embarking on the journey to where I once belonged and at the same time becoming a tourist in my own history."[38] This process is similar to turning pages in family albums, revisiting specific moments of the past, but in a much more literal way. The notion of tourism in one's own history is engaging in its relationship to time travel. There is a transient element in Otsuka's images, relating to absence and presence of self, and in being two places at once, an impossible task in the ordinary world. Roland Barthes recalls the photograph as, "reality in a past state: at once the past and the real."[39] Otsuka's work removes any separation of the self in different stages by uniting the past and present into a singular digital composite. *Imagine Finding Me* is so successful in its execution that without context, the viewer might read the image as a familial of mother and child, which touches upon self-love, and care. Otsuka demonstrates an emotional intelligence and self-awareness in her practice that shows both independence and tenderness of embracing her entire being and her own history. "What advice would you give your younger self if you could go back in time?" It is in this photographic exploration that Otsuka has given herself permission to accept her path in its entirety.

post script

If grief is love persevering, can a family photograph be defined as love preserved? The grieving process is subjective to experience, just like the interpretation of images. By gathering images that spark a curiosity or that resonate on an emotional level, I have created building blocks for myself to recognize truths in my own family photographs that affirm my identity as daughter, as sister, as innocent, as loved. It is in the process of researching and looking deeply at these inward photographic explorations that I have experienced growth and healing in navigating the stages of bereavement that continually cycle through me.

artist biographies

CLARISSE D'ARCIMOLES (b. 1986) is a French artist based in London, UK. She studied Set Design for Performance at Central Saint Martins followed by a MA course in photography. Working mostly around archives, the reconnection of the past and present reflects d'Arcimoles' fascination with photography as a permanent recorder of memories combined with the impossibility of reversing time. From re-staging personal snapshots to anonymous photographic portraits and historical photography, Clarisse takes satisfaction living within the fiction she is creating. Throughout the years, Clarisse d'Arcimoles' work has been enthusiastically received with exhibitions and awards in the UK and internationally. Selected exhibitions include The Newspeak: British Art Now at the Saatchi Gallery (2010, London & Adelaide) Forget Nostalgia, Breese little Gallery (2013, London) Women Artists Women collector, Marcelle Joseph Projects (2014, London) Forgotten Tale, The Photographers' gallery (2016, London) I Wish you all, Eleven Spitalfields (2017, London) d'Arcimoles is represented by the Printsales at the Photographer's Gallery.

JESS T. DUGAN is an artist whose work explores issues of identity through photographic portraiture. Dugan's work has been widely exhibited and is in the permanent collections of over 35 museums throughout the United States. Dugan's monographs include To Survive on This Shore: Photographs and Interviews with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Older Adults (Kehrer Verlag, 2018) and Every Breath We Drew (Daylight Books, 2015). They are the recipient of a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant, an ICP Infinity Award, and were selected by the Obama White House as an LGBT Artist Champion of Change. They are represented by the Catherine Edelman Gallery in Chicago, IL.

ROSY MARTIN is an artist-photographer, therapist, lecturer, workshop leader and writer. Themes that she has explored in articles, exhibitions and workshops include gender, sexuality, family dynamics, class, aging, shame, power/powerlessness, health and disease, location, bereavement, grief and loss. She is currently a lecturer at Loughborough University in Art History and Cultural Studies, and lives in London, England.

CATHERINE OPIE (b. 1961 Sandusky, Ohio) received a BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute and an MFA from California Institute of the Arts. She holds an endowed position in the department of art at the University of California, Los Angeles, where she has been a professor of photography since 2001.

Her work has been exhibited extensively at institutions worldwide including Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo (2017); Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2016 and 2010); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2016); MOCA Pacific Design Center, Los Angeles (2016); Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus (2015); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2014); Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2011); Portland Art Museum (2010); The Guggenheim Museum, New York (2008); Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2006); Saint Louis Art Museum (2000); The Photographers' Gallery, London (2000); and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1997); among others. In 2016 she completed a monumental installation for the new Los Angeles Federal Courthouse.

Opie has received numerous honors and awards including a Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden New York Gala Honoree (2019); John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Guggenheim Fellowship (2019); Smithsonian Archives of American Art Medal (2016); Julius Shulman Institute Excellence in Photography Award (2013); Women's Caucus for Art President's Award for Lifetime Achievement (2009); United States Artists Fellowship (2006); Larry Aldrich Award (2004); Washington University Freund Fellowship (1999); and the Citibank Private Bank Emerging Artist Award (1997).

Her work is included in the permanent collections of many museums worldwide, such as the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Tate Modern, London; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Israel Museum, Jerusalem; and Centro Cultural Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City; among others. She lives and works in Los Angeles.

CHINO OTSUKA was born in Tokyo, Japan and came to UK to be educated at *Summerhill School,* the progressive co-educational boarding school, at the age of 10. She studied photography at University of Westminster and received MA in Fine Art Photography at Royal College of Art. She has exhibited internationally in museums such as The J. Paul Getty Museum, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Dong Gang Museum of Photography, South Korea and Tokyo Photographic Art Museum and in many international Photo Festivals. Recently her work has been touring the US museums as the part of the collections from Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Her practice-based research has led to a creative research fellowship at the British Library, UK and an artist residency in Nikkei National Museum in Canada.

Work can be found in numerous international museum collections including Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, Huis Marseille Museum, Amsterdam, Victoria & Albert Museum, UK, Wilson Centre of Photography and Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art, US. She has also published four books in Japan as a writer.

The Internationally acclaimed work, *Imagine Finding Me,* has become the most exhibited work having been shown in over 16 countries. Her work is written in many publications and academic books, such as being included in a series of textbooks for Norwegian High School.

JO SPENCE (b.15 June 1934–d. 24 June 1992) was a British photographer, a writer, cultural worker, and a photo therapist. She began her career in the field of commercial photography but soon started her own agency which specialized in family portraits, and wedding photos. In the 1970s, she refocused her work towards documentary photography, adopting a politicized approach to her art form, with socialist and feminist themes revisited throughout her career. Self-portraits about her own fight with breast cancer, depicting various stages of her breast cancer to subvert the notion of an idealized female form, inspired projects in 'photo therapy', a means of using the medium to work on psychological health.

ANDREA JENKINS WALLACE is a Colorado based photographer whose work explores narrative, identity, and ideas universal to human experience. Using her son, his friends, herself, among others as subjects, she creates long-form photo projects in which she seeks to illuminate aspects of the people pictured and their relationships with others over a period of time. She received her MFA from the University of Colorado at Boulder, and worked as Assistant Professor at Lake Forest College and Willamette University. Her film, *Rochell and Brian,* a documentary about teenage pregnancy, premiered at the New York International Independent Film Festival. She exhibits nationally and internationally with numerous shows throughout the Americas, Europe, China and the Middle East. Wallace is currently the Vice President of Artistic Affairs and the Director of Photography and New Media at Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Snowmass Village, CO.

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