The Affect of Images by Sam Hopple

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Abstract

The Affect of Images is an experimental exhibition in publication form. It addresses the subjective nature of the interpretation of images and their affective responses by looking at the works of six contemporary photographers whose practices investigate maternal exposures, self-portraiture and re-enactment. It discusses the therapeutic aspects of photography by introducing techniques in phototherapy and how they are used in each photographer's artistic practice. The selected works explore how the body and the lens work in collaboration to successfully explore concepts of memory, identity, representation, parent/child relationships, vulnerability, grief, and time. Weaving personal narrative, visual analysis and photo theory, this text contributes to an emerging dialogue on reframing the de/constructed and re/constructed image as a mechanism for healing and identity awareness. This work also explores the labour of curatorial practice as a therapeutic tool for self-awareness and healing. Photographers under examination include Clarisse d'Arcimoles, Jess T. Dugan, Catherine Opie, Chino Otsuka, Jo Spence & Rosy Martin and Andrea Jenkins Wallace.

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Table of Contents

1.	Introduction and theme	5-6
2.	Methodologies	7-8
3.	Literature Review	9-10
4.	Exhibition Review	11-12
5.	Installation concept/Design	13
6.	Conclusion	14
7.	Appendix	15-20
8.	Bibliography	21
9.	Artist Biographies	22-24

Introduction and Theme

Photography is a medium in which we can see ourselves reflected accurately. Facial expression, body language, and environment give cues to the viewer about the mood of the subject, and can evoke affective responses that translate into emotions as we recognize them as familiar. Memories are part of this recognition, and the reading of a photograph can bring up moments from our past. Specific to one's own history are snapshots from the family album, or images with personal connections to childhood or ancestry. Rosy Martin, the artistic collaborator of photographer Jo Spence says, "Family albums provide a rich resource for autobiographical storytelling and an exploration of family systems: how it was to be part of this family and how these early experiences continue to affect the individual."¹ As human beings, we experience ups and downs, and not all memories are pleasant. In response to trauma, these memories are sometimes suppressed as a method of self-protection. The reading of the family album can act as a mental time machine, transporting us to specific moments in our own histories. Self-portraiture, familial portraiture, and childhood re-enactments can be useful in processing our past.

Phototherapy, specifically re-enactment photography, was legitimised as an artistic practice by Jo Spence and Rosy Martin in the early 1980s. Methods in re-enactment photography involve returning to the family album to source an image in one's past to trigger a memory that requires therapeutic attention, such as early childhood traumas, to find resolve through reframing the narrative. "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 it—that is change our impression of what we think it is about," Martin and Spence write. "Put crudely, reframing is a kind of internal permission-giving: permission to change, to re-view, to let go, to move on."² This practice is the foundation of and sets the groundwork for my research/curatorial project.

The intersection of psychology and contemporary photography is a fascinating place of research, specifically within curatorial and artistic practice. In the exhibition *The Affect of Images* (2021), photographs from six contemporary photographers who use re-enactment portraiture, self-portraiture, and familial portraiture in their professional practices are analysed to look

¹ Martin, Rosy. "Inhabiting the image: photography, therapy and re-enactment phototherapy", European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling, 2009. 11:1, 35-49, DOI: 10.1080/13642530902723074

² Martin, Rosy, and Jo Spence. "New Portraits for Old: The Use of the Camera in Therapy." *Feminist Review*, no. 19, 1985, p. 67. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1394985.

deeper into themes of memory, time, identity, recognition, grief, and healing. British photographer **Jo Spence** (fig 1.) along with **Rosy Martin** pioneered techniques of re-enactment and phototherapeutic processes in contemporary art. **Catherine Opie** (fig 2.) looks to Renaissance Painters to reclaim the narrative of representation in art historical portraiture. **Andrea Jenkins Wallace** (fig 3.) makes herself a subject in her familial portraiture by navigating a tumultuous relationship with her declining mother. **Jess T. Dugan** (fig 4.) embraces a new physical change in undergoing chest reconstruction surgery to become more aligned with their gender identity, and uses self-portraiture to mark the enduring relationship they have with their mother. **Clarisse d'Arcimoles** (fig 5.) uses childhood re-enactment to recreate images from childhood in exact detail, and the work explores the camera's failure to stop time. **Chino Otsuka** (fig 6.) uses digital editing processes to superimpose her adult self as a companion to her younger self as a way of exploring her Eastern and Western heritages.

Methodologies

My methods of research do not fit within a traditional disciplinary approach, and therefore A/r/tography is the most accurate way to describe this undertaking. Scholar and theorist Stephanie Springgay states, "A/r/tography is a living practice; a life writing, life creating experience into the personal, political, and professional aspects of one's life. Through attention to memory, identity, autobiography, reflection, meditation, storytelling, interpretation, and/or representation, artists/researchers/teachers expose their living practices in evocative ways."³ I came into the Criticism and Curatorial Practice programme with the selected images in hand for further inquiry, drawn to their portrayals of childhood and the maternal. I communicated with the artists for image permissions and gave them an overview of the project I wished to develop. I first identified that I wanted to use curatorial practice as a tool to support my own therapeutic process of grief and early childhood trauma of losing my parents at an early age to a drunk driver. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I had to think creatively about how I wanted to present my work. I decided that I wanted to make an intimate publication to function as the exhibition space in order to focus on the written work and to make the exhibition more accessible. A book is a physical record, and it felt important to me to produce something tangible. To expand this process, I began to articulate why I was drawn to the images in the first place, the affective encounter. I read the images emotionally, similar to the way Roland Barthes treats photographs in Camera Lucida (1980), and recorded my affective responses, noting how they made me feel. I also identified what may translate on an emotional level more broadly for the viewer. I then produced a visual analysis of the images without additional research, identifying the formal elements, position of the figure, gaze, and physical environment of the portraits. Clear themes began to surface, and I then dove into the theoretical framework to support my findings.

Another important element to my research was self-immersion and further education. I received a scholarship from Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Snowmass, Colorado to participate in two workshops: a studio course called *Making the Personal Resonate* and a seminar called *Portraiture and Figuration. Making the Personal Resonate* was taught by photographer Betsy Schneider and is where I dove deeper into the maker side of photographic practice. It was an incredibly vulnerable course, and I made images of the landscape where my parents lived and

³ Springgay, Stephanie, et al. "A/r/Tography as Living Inquiry Through Art and Text." Qualitative Inquiry, vol. 11, no. 6, Dec. 2005, pp. 897–912.

where I had spent a considerable amount of time growing up, as a way of connecting to the land and my roots. I also photographed my sister, now a mother of three young boys, one of which has a genetic condition that requires the distribution of oral chemotherapy each morning. I built a portfolio of these images and reflected on them for self-growth. *Portraiture and Figuration* was a five-day virtual seminar with Catherine Opie, Helen Molesworth and Nicole Eisenmann, which lead to engaging dialogues on their individual practices and the consideration of the figure in each. By assuming the role of 'photographer', I was able to become a 'method actor' in my own research. This opened perspective into the vulnerable and intimate nature of the personal photographic practice, leading itself to a more empathetic approach to the research.

Literature Review

In continuing with the 'method acting' approach outlined above, I began reading autobiographies and exhibition texts from contemporary photographers working in my area of research for a narrated perspective by practitioners. This included Sally Mann's memoir *Hold Still* (2015), Latoya Ruby Frazier's *The Notion of Family* (2001-2014), Jo Spence & Rosy Martin's *New Portraits for Old: The Use of the Camera in Therapy* (1985), Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1980) among others. These texts give personal insight to why photography becomes an interest to artists in the first place, as well as the more technical side of making the work. Mann's text was particularly resonant in considering the thoughtful way she photographed her children and navigated the criticism she received in photographing her children nude.⁴ Martin and Spence's texts on re-enactment were a foundational resource in how the body and the camera come together in healing practices and memory work. They contained thorough descriptions of the phototherapeutic process from start to finish, giving evidence of healing and memory conjuring that could occur through the practice. I was also moved by Barthes' narration on grief and reading images both emotionally and critically in *Camera Lucida*, which inspired me to do the same in my own research.⁵

In the context of this work, the term *affect* is used in relation to the emotional reading of images, and the feelings that derive from the act of looking. In *Feeling Photography* (2014), an anthology of texts compiled by editors Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu, the emphasis is on the emotional interpretations, exploring larger themes of intimacy, trauma, and identity. Brown and Phu expand upon Barthes' definitions of *studium* and *punctum*. The *studium* refers to the larger cultural and social meaning of the image, whereas the *punctum* is the recognition of something within the image itself that draws one to it subjectively, such as a gaze, gesture or overall mood, which then creates a *feeling* in the viewer.⁶ These terms legitimized what I had been feeling in my own grieving process, confirming my claims that the reading of images can contribute to healing by approaching the image with "affective intentionality".⁷ *Feeling Photography* was also

⁴ Mann, Sally. *Hold Still: A Memoir with Photographs*. New York: Back Bay, 2016.

⁵ Barthes, Roland. "STUDIUM and PUNCTUM." *Camera Lucida Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981. pp. 25-27.

⁶ "Introduction", *Feeling Photography*. Ed. Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu. Durham: Duke UP, 2014. p.7

helpful in its inclusion of feminist theory and representation which were crucial to Dana Seitler's analysis of Catherine Opie's self-portraits.⁸

Family Frames (1997) by Marianne Hirsch was instrumental in theorizing mother/daughter portraits and complex familial relationships through her memory work and reaching a place of reconciliation, much like Wallace has done in her photographic work.⁹ Her writing on resemblance and recognition were thought-provoking and stay with me as I continue looking back on my own images. Additionally, I looked at John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972) for his interpretations on gaze and the figure, and Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2004) in its interpretation of image reading, particularly related to trauma.

The writing styles of auto-theorists like Maggie Nelson *Argonauts* (2015), Amy Fung *Before I* was a Critic I was a Human Being (2019), Rebecca Solnit *The Faraway Nearby* (2013), and bell hooks *All About Love* (2000) were also important references in their balance of personal narrative and theoretical framework. They provided a road map to writing critically while also producing a document that resonated with the reader. I would like to continue my writing on this topic and produce a book with similar affect and honesty.

⁸ Seitler, Dana. "Making Sexuality Sensible: Tammy Rae Carland's and Catherine Opie's Queer Aesthetic Forms." *Feeling Photography*. Ed. Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu. Durham: Duke UP, (2014) p.57.

⁹ Hirsch, Marianne. "Masking the Subject." *Family Frames: Photography Narrative and Postmemory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2016.

Exhibition Review

As a child, I visited The National Portrait Gallery in London and it was in these portraits that I found familiarity. This was my first experience of noticing that the reading of an artwork is subjective to one's experience and that we gravitate towards certain images and are repelled by others. Exhibitions of photography and portraiture have continued to be influential in my life, and thus, this research as an extension of myself. Clarisse d'Arcimoles' Un-Possible Retour (2011) was an body of work I encountered at the Saatchi Gallery in London.¹⁰ The intimate scale of the images drew me in closer, and I found familiarity in them as they looked like my own disposables. d'Arcimoles compositions used images from her childhood that were displayed above meticulous re-enactments from family members as adults. The works surfaced memories from my own childhood, leading to more critical thinking of how the original images and reenacted portraits worked together in returning to a moment in time. A similar body of work, Back to the Future (2010-12) comes from Irina Werning, who instead of re-enacting her own childhood images helps others to do so. Werning uses Photoshop along with others' snapshots to recreate compositions of subjects of all ages and ethnographic backgrounds.¹¹ These comparative images of past and present show the inevitable change in our bodies, yet speak to the endurance of one's personality through facial expression. These images also allow for the subject to recognize the innocence in themselves, an important element in personal growth. These images were a visual introduction to re-enactment in a contemporary art space which propelled further inquiry into photo theory and phototherapy.

Chino Otsuka's *Imagine Finding Me* (2006) works along these lines. As Otsuka places her adultself next to her child-self in images from her past, she is able to find companionship as she reworks these images. These juxtapositions challenge the truth of what we perceive to be real in the photograph, and are layered in their connections with memory work. In addition to have being shown in galleries, *Imagine Finding Me* is also a photo book, and in this format paired with words, more context is found into the artist's subjective experience.¹²

Portrayals of the outsider have also influenced this work. Although a portrait photographer may not place themself in front of the lens, who they choose to photograph can give clues into their

¹⁰ d'Arcimoles, Clarisse. *Un-Possible Retour.* Saatchi Gallery. 2011.

¹¹ Werning, Irina. *Back to the Future*, 2010-12, irinawerning.com/gallery/back-to-the-future-thumbs/.

¹² Otsuka, Chino. *Imagine Finding Me*. Trace Editions, 2006.

identity. A prime example is Diane Arbus, whose exhibition *Diane Arbus: Photographs, 1956-1971* at the Art Gallery of Ontario (2020), gave dignity to developmentally disabled and othered subjects in her captures.¹³ Catherine Opie's portraits shown at the Hammer Musem and Regen Projects in Los Angeles function similarly, as she gives reverence and gravitas in her portrayals of subjects in the queer community. Opie's work questions power and representation in the art historical canon, while also making space for a new generation, emblematized by the work of Jess T. Dugan, whose portraits focus on those who identify as transgender and non-binary.

Additionally, it is important to note the format of this exhibition as a publication, existing outside of the gallery, as a book. Other examples of the book as exhibition space include photographer Teju Cole's *Blind Spot* (2017), which pairs 150+ images of world travel with creatively written texts.¹⁴ Cole's writing is poetic and meditative and is an example of a less didactic and more artistic body of work in published form, similar to Chino Otsuka's work. Curators such as Anna Sophie Springer have also utilized this format to produce exhibitions, that combine research, artworks, and theoretical frameworks into publications. Springer founded K. Verlag in 2011, a publishing atelier in Berlin that supports hybridized forms of exhibitions. She is also a well versed scholar, who published *Fantasies of the Library* (2018) with Etienne Turpin as, "a book that acts both as library and exhibition space, selecting, arranging, and housing texts and images, aligning itself with printed matter in the process."¹⁵ As the curatorial field becomes more hybridized, it has been helpful to see established models that are pushing the boundaries of what the exhibition can be.

¹³ Arbus, Diane. *Diane Arbus' Photographs, 1956-1971*. Art Gallery of Ontario. February 22 – November 8, 2020. Estate of Diane Arbus.

¹⁴ Cole, Teju. *Blind Spot*. Penguin Random House, 2017.

¹⁵ Springer, Anna-Sophie, Turpin, Etienne. *Fantasies of the Library*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018.

Installation Concept/Design

The global pandemic and remote learning that followed posed challenges in securing a brickand-mortar exhibition space to display these images. As writing was an important element in this work for both contextualization of the images and the incorporation of personal narrative, I decided to produce an exhibition catalogue, or publication to serve as the exhibition itself. It was not my intention for this work to exist solely in a digital archive, but rather, to be something tangible and physical to distribute to the artists and my community, as a concrete reflection of my labour in graduate school.

As the art world shifts from traditional norms, there becomes room for more experimental methods of curatorial practice. I required flexibility in the development of this work, and the book/publication format allowed for a more creative approach to curation. It also provided an opportunity to create a more immersive and intimate experience for myself, while allowing deeper contextualization of my subjectivity for the viewer. The writing process was both difficult and meditative, and it was in the writing that I was able to make connections I may not have had I worked in a physical space. In a time where museums and galleries are just beginning to open back up, I found solace in artist books, exhibition catalogues, and photo theory. I wanted to create a piece that one could spend time with, and have a record of, so I partnered with a graphic designer to create an inviting and accessible text. The publication is small in scale, and gives the viewer an invitation to experience the work more intimately.

Conclusion

The making of *The Affect of Images* was difficult, cathartic, revealing, vulnerable and generated personal growth. This work confirms the power that photography can have in connecting us to our past, while becoming more self-aware about our identities. Images of six contemporary photographers were included to investigate larger concepts of memory, identity, representation, familial relationships and grief. The publication format allowed for more personal and intimate exploration of re-enactment photography, giving insight to the artist's photographic practices, and a deeper understanding of affect in its relation to photo theory, and the emotional resonance that images can foster by looking critically. The selected compositions are visual examples showing how the body and the lens work in collaboration to serve each photographer's unique practice. Through visual analysis and theoretical research, the images have been deeply contextualized and contribute to an emerging dialogue on the power of reframing the de/constructed and re/constructed image. *The Affect of Images* shows that curatorial practice is an effective therapeutic tool for healing and transformation, while recognizing the subjectivities that propel us into further engagement.

Appendix

Fig 1.



The Old School Jo Spence and Rosy Martin Photo: David Roberts 1987 © Jo Spence Memorial Archive, Ryerson Image Centre, Courtesy of Rosy Martin Fig 2.



Catherine Opie Self Portrait / Nursing 2004

C-print 40 x 32 inches (101.6 x 81.3 cm)

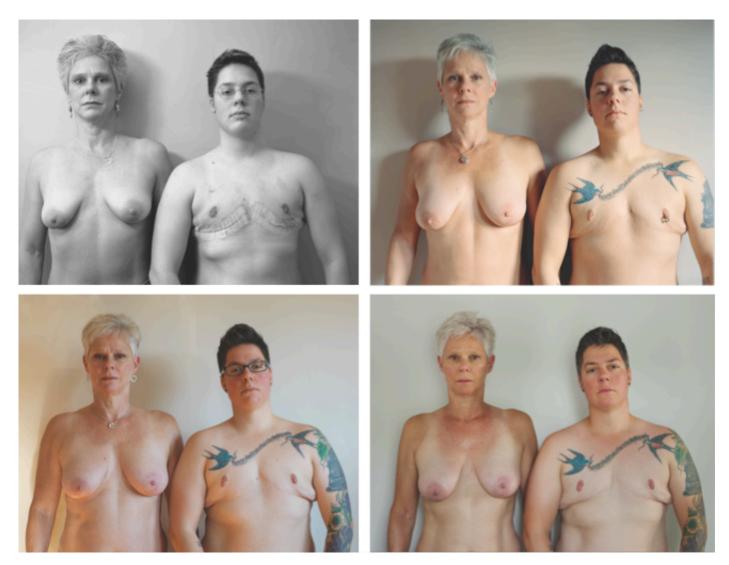
 $\ensuremath{\mathbb{C}}$ Catherine Opie, Courtesy Regen Projects, Los Angeles and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul

Fig 3.



Andrea Jenkins Wallace *Familiar,* 2012. Digital print. © Andrea Jenkins Wallace, Courtesy of the artist

Fig 4.



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

© Jess T. Dugan, Courtesy of the artist





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





Chino Otsuka *Imagine Finding Me*, 1976 and 2005, Kamakura, Japan. Digital Photograph. © Chino Otsuka, Courtesy of the artist

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Artist Bios

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 & amp; 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 (15 June 1934–24 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.