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edited by **Tamara Ashley and Alexis Weedon**

DEVELOPING A SENSE OF PLACE

The Role of the Arts in Regenerating Communities

Developing a Sense of Place

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7

This Is Not My House: Notes on film-making, photography and my father

David Jackson

Family photographs are about memory and memories: that is, they are about stories of a past, shared (both stories and past) by a group of people that in the moment of sharing produces itself as a family.

– Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets*

This Is Not My House is the title of a film I made in collaboration with my father to accompany an exhibition of photographs I had made previously

Figure 7.1   Film still from *This Is Not My House*, HD video, colour, 2014. © David Jackson.

with him, following my mother's death. After she died my father was left alone in the house he had shared with her for nearly 25 years. The house, nestled on the corner of Carlo Manche Street in Malta (a small ex-British colony which lies in the middle of the Mediterranean between Libya and Sicily), had previously belonged to my maternal grandmother. The resulting creative project – a portrait of my father in still and moving images – mixes photography with film, film with photography. It is both a personal visual record and an emotional inventory, documenting, as it does, an intimate familial exchange between father and son, framed by the immediacies of the Mediterranean not only as a place of lived, everyday experience on the part of my father, but also as a projected space of home and belonging for both of us. This research project – part-biographical, part-ethnographic – is a journey simultaneously of the head and the heart, a journey which draws on stories from my own life about my own family and my shared past with them.

Whilst the project began creatively as an act of mourning in response to my mother's death, it also emerges as a project made within a university environment when I taught film-making as a full-time academic at the University of Bedfordshire. Given the project's development in an academic setting, it would be fair to say that it has also been a creative testing out and thinking through of ideas about how I might fit into the academy as a film-maker and, more specifically, of the idea that an arts practice might be a form of research.

Smith and Dean, the editors of *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts*, argue that there has been a turn to creative practice which they regard as 'one of the most exciting and revolutionary developments to occur within the university over the past two decades' (2009, 1). As defined by Smith and Dean, practice-led research refers both 'to the work of art as a form of research and to the creation of the work as generating research insights which might then be documented, theorised and generalised' (p. 7). Importantly, they regard these latter elements – the documentation, generalisation and theorisation of the artwork – as 'crucial to its fulfilling all the functions of research' (p. 7). In response to the myriad forms of academic research now conducted within the university, they have constructed a useful model of creative arts and research processes and the overlapping and interconnected patterns between theory and practice which they call 'the iterative cyclic web' (p. 8). This model, they suggest, accommodates the different forms of research currently being conducted across the arts and humanities, and includes traditional academic research, practice-led research and research-led practice. Their model reflects what they regard as the

complex overlapping and alternations between the two modes (practice and theory) in the research process, and central to the model is the concept of 'iteration' which, they argue, is fundamental to both modes: 'To iterate a process is to repeat it several times (though probably with some variation) before proceeding, setting up a cycle: start-end-start' (p. 19). Smith and Dean's model seems to me an accurate reflection of the conditions of production of my own project, as it recognises the fluidity and cyclic alternation between the two modes of practice and research. In their model the two approaches are woven together, inseparably intertwined, each being continuously shaped by the other, an observation my (still unfinished) project would endorse.

Family photography and cultural memory

This project, then, uses autoethnographic memory work with family photographs; in other words, it seeks to put memory to work by using material objects such as family photographs as prompts in

Figure 7.2   Portrait with broken arm, photograph by David Jackson from the series *So Blue, So Beautiful*, colour, C-type print.

the remembering of personal stories. In doing so, the project explores the ways in which memory – that is, 'the activities and the products of remembering' (Kuhn 2000, 179) – can bring together the personal, the social and the historical. By telling stories about my own family's past, I'm looking to find new ways of understanding my father's biography: in particular his feelings of postcolonial displacement as a widowed British expat now living alone, and the ways in which his personal story criss-crosses and intersects with broader historical narratives linking the distant southern shores of the Mediterranean to the northern shores of the United Kingdom via post-war migration and back again. Key to this research is a practical use of film and photography in a sensory, affective register – both separately and together – to demonstrate memory's complex role in making identities 'that place us as members both of families and of wider communities – communities of class, gender, nation, for instance' (Kuhn 2000, 179).

Much of the flourishing research on cultural and social memory across the humanities and social sciences over the past two decades has sought to enhance our understanding of how personal memory operates in the cultural sphere and to inquire how, where and when memories are produced, and how people make use of these memories in their everyday lives (Kuhn 2007, 283). The cultural theorists Marianne Hirsch and Annette Kuhn, in particular, have been formative in situating my own practice within this research field; by practice I mean to encompass overlapping kinds of activity which include cycles of thinking and making, reflecting and writing. In asking how personal memory figures and shapes the social world, both Hirsch and Kuhn point to the importance of photography – especially ordinary family photography – in the production of memories about our own lives and how these memories are bound, more broadly, to cultural memory. Annette Kuhn's theoretical excursions in this field have been ongoing for the last 20 years or so, beginning with the publication of *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (2002), a collection of essays she describes elsewhere (Kuhn 2000, 179) as autobiographical case studies in a revisionist mode, and continuing with further refinements and clarifications of key concepts and methods in other occasional essays (Kuhn 2007, 2010).

In *Family Secrets*, Kuhn makes imaginative and creative excursions into her own past by examining her own private family photographs and the memories associated with them. The autobiographical trajectory she enacts, though, has a decidedly political intent since her project aims to find new ways of conceptualising the ways personal memories 'relate to, intersect, or are continuous' with shared, collective and more public forms

Figure 7.3   The family album, photograph by David Jackson from the series *So Blue, So Beautiful*, colour, C-type print.

of memory. Photography as a medium is intimately entangled in the production of memory, both personal and collective. A photograph, suggests Kuhn, is a form of evidence, but not in a directly mimetic sense of mirroring the real or even in a self-evidential relationship between itself and what the photograph may show (2002, 13). Making a photograph yield its possible meanings is not a transparent proposition; paradoxically, she observes, the more closely you look at a photograph, the less you will see: look closely with a magnifying glass and all the photograph will reveal is grain and blur and light and dark patches. The photograph, she argues, will yield nothing to this kind of scrutiny: 'to show what it is evidence of, a photograph must always point you away from itself' (p. 13). Whilst photographs may act as prompts to producing personal memories, these memories may well not have anything to do with what is actually in the photograph. 'Memories evoked by a photo', she writes, 'do not simply spring out of the image itself, but are generated in a network, an intertext of discourses that shift between past and present, spectator and image, and between all these cultural contexts, historical moments' (p. 14). What matters here is putting memory to work in a productive sense with the photograph.

Kuhn defines the concept of memory work as 'an active practice of remembering which takes an inquiring attitude towards the past and the activity of its (re)construction through memory' (2007, 284). Importantly, Kuhn wants to short-circuit assumptions about transparency or authenticity or even the 'truth' of what is remembered. Memory work should challenge the 'taken-for-grantedness' of memory. Instead, she argues, memory work should seek 'a conscious and purposeful staging of memory' whereby cultural material is rigorously interpreted, interrogated and mined (p. 284). Memory work, as a working concept, is developed in *Family Secrets* as a specific mode of inquiry embodying a number of methodological assumptions which she develops into a four-pronged approach to the study of a single photograph. First, Kuhn says we need to consider the subject(s) of the photograph. She suggests starting with a simple description, and then moving into an account in which you take up the position of the subject. Using the third person, she claims, is useful at this point. Second, she asks us to consider the photograph's context of production: where, when, how, by whom was the picture taken? Third, she urges a consideration of the context in which the image was made: here questions of photographic technology, aesthetics and conventions are raised. Finally, she says we need to consider the contexts of reception: who was the photograph made for? Who has it now and where is it kept? Who saw it then and who sees it now? (2002, 8). As an exercise, the aim of this methodology is to develop a radical approach to reading a photograph. To this end, Kuhn quotes John Berger, who advises that 'a radial system has to be constructed around the photograph' (Kuhn 2002, 9). This interpretive method needs to incorporate the personal with the wider political, historical and economic layers in which everyday memory and experience are necessarily woven.

Family photographs are particularly useful prompts as material for the interpretation of cultural memory. As we experience them in our daily lives, photographs of this kind have a special place in our own lives and carry a powerful affective charge, and yet are virtually invisible as objects in all their everydayness. It is exactly this line between the visibility and invisibility of these seemingly transparent domestic objects that has brought family photography to the attention of contemporary theorists, critics and artists (e.g. Hirsch 1999; Spence 1986; Batchen 2008; Bourdieu 1990; Kuhn 2002; Berger 1980). Taking an array of interdisciplinary perspectives, these various writers and critics attempt to deconstruct the myth of family, pointing to the rigid conventions of family photographs and the limited, rule-bound representations they give rise to. Similarly, many of these writers have devised radical reading

practices that scrutinise and critique photography's perceived role as an instrument of familial ideology. Marianne Hirsch, in particular, seeks to interrogate, question and contest what she perceives as the complex interactions between family and photography. In *Family Frames* (1997) and *The Familial Gaze* (1999), she strives for what she terms a 'resistant reading' when she poses the following questions: what can we learn from family snapshots or more formal portraits; and, as inscriptions of family ties, what stories does the family album ultimately tell? (1999, xvi). Hirsch argues that the family album is the main problem because it consists of photographs that convey the romantic ideal of family life rather than the messy reality. She writes:

> This myth or image – whatever its contents may be for a specific group – dominates lived reality, even though it can exist in conflict with it and can be ruled by different interests. It survives by means of its narrative and imaginary power, a power that photographs have a particular capacity to tap. (Hirsch 1997, 8)

One way of looking at the narrative power of family photographs, Hirsch contends, is to locate them in the contradictory space between the myth and lived reality of familial relations. As such, one possible way of destabilising the myth of family is to create new narratives around old family photographs.

According to Hirsch, the individual subject is constituted in the space of the family through looking, or what she terms 'the familial gaze'. Hirsch defines the familial gaze as 'the conventions and ideologies of family through which they see themselves' (1999, xi). This distinctive form of looking within the family, she suggests, is both 'affiliative and identificatory': as I look, I am always also looked at (Hirsch 1997, 9). It is in this sense, then, that we can say that familial subjectivity is constructed relationally and entails relationships of power, domination and sub-jection. What we need, Hirsch insists, 'is a language that will allow us to see the coded and conventional nature of family pictures – to bring the conventions to the foreground and thus to contest their ideological power' (1997, 10).

Refocusing the familial gaze

One such project is Sultan's *Pictures from Home* (1992). The photographer and writer Larry Sultan spent over a decade photographing his parents

in their home in Southern California. *Pictures from Home* is a collection of carefully staged choreographed portraits of his mother and father, Irving and Jean. The intimate photographs he made evoke the mundane togetherness of a long marriage and the optimism and frustrations of family life in the wealthy suburbs of the San Fernando Valley. In the photographs we see his mother, Jean, preparing a Thanksgiving turkey; Irving, his father, sitting on the edge of the bed, formally dressed in his dark blue office suit; Jean in the garage about to get in a car for a meeting; and, most famously, Irving practising his golf stroke in the living room while watching daytime television. Interwoven with these lush, beautiful pictures are snapshots taken from the family album, blown-up printed strips of 16-mm home-movie footage, and a first-person narrative that serves as an ongoing commentary on the project over time. When all these layers are read together, *Pictures from Home* reveals the multiplicity of looks that circulate between the son, the mother, the father, the husband and wife, and underscores the complex negotiation of roles involved in familial interaction as individual, personal identities encounter one another across the span of a lifetime (Hirsch 1999, xi).

The project began as a portrait of Sultan's father. After a long career at the Schick Safety Razor Company, Irving had recently been forced into early retirement after enjoying corporate success as a vice-president. Sultan's manifest intention was to show what happens when companies discard their unwanted elderly workers in favour of younger ones. At first Sultan thought he was interested in how his father's resulting feelings of powerlessness and resentment might show themselves at home with family. However, as he began to make the pictures, 'deeper impulses' Sultan was 'unaware' of came into play. In his commentary, the photographer writes: 'I can remember the peculiar feeling I had looking at the first pictures that I made of him. I was recreating him and, like a parent with an infant, I had the power to observe him knowing that I would not be observed myself' (1992, 10). Usually it's the parent who does the looking, who takes the picture, who tells the family's story by constructing a family album. But the opposite is the case in *Pictures from Home*. Instead, Sultan's images subtly and unexpectedly reverse the conventional familial relationships.

In his published essay about the project, Sultan gives an account of a telephone conversation with his mother over a picture he took of her for the real-estate section of the *LA Times*. His mother, a highly successful real-estate saleswoman, was so 'miserable' with the photograph that she refused to tell anyone her son, a highly regarded professional photographer, had taken it, claiming she had to hire a 'hack' to

do the job instead because he wasn't available. 'Who would buy a house from someone who looks so severe?' she asked her son. 'It doesn't even look like me. I hate that picture' (Sultan 1999, 8). Sultan reports that his father shared similar misgivings along with his mother about many of his photographs. 'I just don't know what you're doing,' his father told him; 'I don't know what you're after.' The exchange that followed is highly revealing of the deep, generational chasm between them:

> [Son:] 'All I know is that every time I try to make a photograph, you give me that steely-eyed look. You know it: penetrating but impenetrable, tough and in control. […] It's like you're acting the role of the heroic executive in an annual report, or in a diorama on success. Maybe you're looking for a public image of yourself and I'm interested in something more private, in what happens between events – that brief moment between thoughts where you forget yourself.'

> [Father:] 'All I know is that when you photograph me I feel everything leave me. The blood drains from my face, my eyelids droop, my thoughts disappear. […] All you have to do is to give me that one cue, "Don't smile," and zap. Nothing. That's what you get.'

> [Son:] 'No. What I get is an image of you that you don't like. Doesn't it come down to vanity and power? A question of how you look and who determines that, who's in control of the image?' (Sultan 1999, 8–9)

The dispute between father and son over the photographs poses a crucial question here about the familial gaze: for who does the looking in *Pictures from Home?* And what might be at stake in this looking? At any instant we can see a number of looks and gazes intersecting across the photographs. First there's an exchange of looks between the camera/photographer and the subject; then there are the looks between subjects within the photographs, the look of the viewer which, in itself, as Hirsch notes, 'is an infinitely multiple and contradictory series of looks', and, finally, 'the external institutional and ideological gazes in relation to which the act of taking pictures defines itself' (1999, xvi). The child photographing his parents is a reversal of the norm here; it challenges our accepted representations of the family. *Pictures from Home* quietly and steadfastly refocuses the familial gaze, changing our way of seeing family life and familial relations. Irving Sultan saw himself as a successful American businessman, albeit retired. His son disagreed and made some photographs as evidence to the contrary. However, in the process of making the pictures, Sultan expressed a deep sense of unease about his

situation and questioned why he was back in his parents' house with a camera. In his journal he writes:

> Sitting finally on the couch in the dark living room, I begin to sink. My body seems to grow smaller, as if it is finally adjusting itself to the age I feel whenever I'm in their house. It's like I'm inflating the air from an inflatable image and shrinking back down to an essential form. Is this why I've come here? To find myself by photographing them? (Sultan 1992, 10)

I understand Sultan's predicament and share many of his feelings regarding my own endeavours to create a portrait of my father. After the fact of my mother's death, I knew I would have to photograph him. I had no plan, had no precise idea what this would mean, only the certainty of an obligation, which began to impose itself on me. One day, I found myself alone in my parents' house whilst my mother was ill in hospital, and I spent the afternoon aimlessly rummaging through drawers and boxes of discarded memories. In one drawer I found my mother's bus pass. I held it a moment and glanced at her name below her picture: Vincenza Carmela Giuseppa Jackson. It occurred to me suddenly that I had never known her full name before. Of course, I knew her first and last name, but not the middle ones. How could this be? How could I possibly not know my own mother's full name? My father always used a strangely anglicised version of Vincenza: Tina. And, growing up, she was known to us as Tina Jackson. I realised that in the story of her name, née Darmanin, was the story of her passage from one shore to another, through her marriage to my father. On my father's side there had always been a reluctance to recognise her Mediterranean otherness and this was always a source of familial tension. On reflection, I began to realise that my own story, the story of my own identity, was deeply entangled in the story of my mother's Mediterranean crossings. Likewise, to encounter my father to make my photographs and film was also to encounter my*self*. I knew, like Larry Sultan, that returning to my father's house to photograph him, and later to make a film, was also an attempt to find myself and my own sense of place.

Between island and empire

There's a framed photograph that used to hang on a white wall above my father's desk in his house in Malta. It hung next to an assortment of other family photographs. To be truthful, I never paid much attention to this

photograph in the 20 or so years it hung there: it was just a family photograph, the same as any other. The photograph was taken in St Joseph's Church Hall in Southsea, Portsmouth, on Saturday, 31 March 1962, the day of my parents' wedding. At the centre of the picture are my father, aged 22, and my mother, aged 19. I found myself looking at this photograph over and over in the two weeks I spent with my father after my mother's death. When I asked my father about it, he told me it was taken by Kenneth L. Guy, a local professional photographer. The photograph had cost 15 shillings for 'a half plate mounted' and the photographer's fee for attending the wedding was one pound (my father still has the receipt from Mr Guy with his address and telephone number: 78 Middle St, Southsea, 27061).

When we buried my mother, it fell upon me as the eldest to make a final address. Standing at her graveside, in the shadows of the cypress trees, suspended between light and dark, close to the invisible boundary between life and death, I wondered about the multiple and mutable meetings, crossings and journeys evoked in the wedding photograph that had led us all to this place. For me, the photograph was more than

Figure 7.4   The wedding photograph on the wall, photograph by David Jackson from the series *So Blue, So Beautiful*, colour, C-type print.

a document of the ceremonial meeting between my mother and my father; it also reverberated with the silent passages made by people whose stories lay outside the frame, passages between north and south, between island and empire, between past and present. The cultural critic Iain Chambers invokes the 'many voices' of the Mediterranean when he writes:

> There is the Mediterranean, the sea itself, not so much as a frontier or barrier between the North and the South, or the East and the West, as an intricate site of encounters and currents. It immediately invokes the movement of peoples, histories, and cultures that underlines the continual sense of historical transformation and cultural translation which makes it a site of perpetual transit. (Chambers 2008, 32)

Perhaps it is in this sense, as 'a site of perpetual transit', that my parents' wedding photograph can be most productively read. For I read this photograph not only as an instrument of a family history but also as an act of cultural memory; for it tells a story, a story that inadvertently evokes the unspoken passages between the shores of the English Channel and the more distant shores of the Mediterranean.

In *Mediterranean Crossings,* Chambers aims to reconfigure previous understandings of any single definition of the Mediterranean by proposing a 'multiple Mediterranean' open to 'other voices, other bodies, other histories' (2008, 388). According to him, 'the Mediterranean' as a category and as an object of study is fundamentally the product of modern geographical, political, cultural and historical classifications. 'It is a construct and a concept', he writes, 'that linguistically entered the European lexicon and acquired a proper name in the nineteenth century' (2008, 12). As he rightly reminds us, it is during this time, of course, that the cartography of much of the Mediterranean and North African coastline and beyond was 'elaborated and divided' by the imperial foreign policies of Britain, France and Italy to encompass Egypt, Algeria and Libya, respectively. In the wake of colonial expansion, argues Chambers, we need to adopt a more fluid geography of the Mediterranean, whereby its boundaries are made vulnerable to the cultural and political importance of discontinuity in the telling of its history. Such a fluid and open-ended understanding, he suggests, will seek to interrupt and disturb 'the discursive desire for transparency', reconfiguring our historical conceptions of the past in order to dissect the present (2008, 387).

This image of the Mediterranean Sea as an open-ended flow that continuously interweaves multiple histories and cultures is a useful trope when it comes to considering not only the photographs I have made with my father, but also photographs I have found in our family archive. In these photographs taken as a whole, the sea is the thread of a narrative, which, even in its absence, pulls together the fragments to produce a family story. The photographs *are* the telling of our story. They serve as literal and metaphorical reminders of the proximity and distance that separates me from my father, as well as stark signs of his emotional displacement and dislocation in the Mediterranean. Looked at together, they are archival and poetic evidence of the vulnerable encounters opened up across distant shores between a group of people I call my family, and affirm the spatial and temporal relationships that give this story its past and present tense. As images on paper, the photographs are also material reminders of the free flow, drift and circulation of memory itself, recording the trace of places near and far. This narrative, then, is still unfolding: unfinished and unresolved.

Five years after I made the photographs, I received an email from my father with the word 'house' in the subject line. He wrote: 'Well the deed is done. I have signed the contract to sell the house and now there is no going back. […] I have arranged for mums grave to be kept clean until they remove her in five years time anyhow. Lots of love dad.' When we talked over his decision to sell his house, he told me that was the end of the story. But it didn't seem like the end of anything to me – more a case of one door closes, and another opens. Indeed, this circular, repetitive movement echoes Smith and Dean's (2009) iterative cyclic web model for creative practice and research mentioned earlier. According to this cyclic model, my initial ideas had been pursued as research and realised through various outputs and/or public outlets: in this instance, photographs, exhibitions, photobook. The 'formulation and theorisation of ideas, processes and techniques which have developed through the creation of the published artwork' may, in turn, Smith and Dean suggest, 'also be published and/or else applied to the generation of future creative works' (2009, 21). And now I was back at the ideas stage: I had made the photographs and had theorised some of the ideas around them, which, in turn, opened up further creative possibilities: this became a film which I called *This Is Not My House*, a title I borrowed from Larry Sultan.

What does home mean? According to Blunt and Dowling (2006), the notion of home as a sense of belonging or attachment is a complex and multi-layered concept. Taking a geographic perspective, they identify two key elements as unique to the idea of home. Home, they suggest,

Figure 7.5 Film still from *This Is Not My House*, HD video, colour, 2014. © David Jackson.

is a *place* we make meaningful and significant to ourselves. We imbue home with feelings, and these feelings, they argue, are 'intrinsically spatial'. In their terms, home is 'a social imaginary', or in other words, a space in which we make an emotional investment. Home is thus 'a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and which construct places, extend across spaces and scales, and connect places' (Blunt and Dowling 2006, 2).

So I returned to Malta. One evening I sat with my father up on his roof drinking cold beer after dark. We talked about his decision to sell the house. He said he wanted to go home. I asked him where he thought home was. Portsmouth, he replied, the place he was born and had grown up. In this respect his answer was similar to the experience of many migrants who identify with their place of origin many years after they have left. We talked some more; I wasn't convinced his plan was a good idea. When we eventually went back downstairs, he complained of a headache and asked if I had any aspirin. I said I didn't. He went to his kitchen window, leant out and smoked a cigarette. His next-door neighbour, Laurie, was leaning out too. My dad mentioned his headache. Laurie popped inside and returned with a pack of aspirin, which he passed over in a kids' fishing net. When my father stepped back inside, I remarked on what I had just witnessed: how could he possibly not feel at home here? After all, he had lived in this house with my mother for nearly 25 years, he knew all his neighbours, and was surrounded by friends who loved and cared for him. This, I told him, *was* his home. He didn't agree.

Figure 7.6 Film still from *This Is Not My House*, HD video, colour, 2014. © David Jackson.

From analogue photography to digital film

My film, *This Is Not My House*, extends the memory work of the photographs, and documents my father's house as inhabited space: in other words, his home. The story of what happens to my father and his home is neither here nor there; the narrative itself is of minimal interest and acts only as a frame for some of the depicted events. Instead of a story, *This Is Not My House* sets out an intimate understanding of my father's everyday reality by taking the ordinary seriously, and stitches together sounds and images into a loose montage of closely observed vignettes in which I ask my father to re-enact aspects of his everyday life before the camera. What matters here, what most concerns me as a researcher, is a question of approach, of method, of form: how best to conjure my father's world into being, how best to understand his experiences, his identities, his way of life?

In making the photographs I used a solely analogue process, from start to finish. I chose a fully manual medium-format camera, a Mamiya RB67, and shot on 120 negative film. Each and every image was purposefully staged and I would more often than not move the camera several times before I was happy with the composition (much to my father's exasperation). Everything about the process was slow. Deliberately so. When it came to making the film, I wanted to ensure my slow working methods continued. My preference initially was to shoot analogue 16-mm film with a Bolex camera, but the costs of the stock, processing

and printing were prohibitive. So I shot digital video instead and kept the slow working method of making photographs. Each camera setup, each shot, was considered in much the same way: from choice of lens to composition, and, in this case, duration of the shot. Interestingly, what is most remarked upon about the film is its photographic quality: how each shot, each image, has the aesthetic quality of a photograph. What I'm trying to do here is place film and photography – still and moving image – into a dialogue with one another as spatial practices.

The difference between a fragment of film and a photograph lies in the specific capacities of still and moving images to give form to a passing moment of lived time as different temporalities. What I mean by this is best illustrated by a short sequence in the middle of the film where my father sits on the edge of his bed and browses silently through photographs in family albums. As he turns the pages, we have, I think, an opportunity to rethink the differing temporalities of the image, in how the moving image depicts stillness. Still images (photographs) are seen throughout the film. We see them in family albums, or hanging on walls, or stored on his computer. My father's identity is bound by the abundance of photographic images he lives with. By asking him to look at his family albums, I am trying to foreground the embodied aspect of photography as a staged act of memory, or in Kuhn's formulation, 'an enacted practice of remembering' (2000, 186). And as we see him leafing through the family album, we not only see the differing temporalities but also *feel* the simultaneous surging capacities of still and moving images to affect and be affected by each other. In this short simple sequence, I am trying not only to draw attention to family photography as a social practice, but also to make visible what we take for granted in everyday life: the passing of time.

Making the film was a struggle, not just technically, but also emotionally. Put simply: my father doesn't like being my subject. My project is a reversal of the usual means of familial looking: I'm the son looking at his father. Framing him as an image is not a straightforward matter. It's complicated for both of us. The entire 10 days of filming was fraught. My father had made himself vulnerable by selling his house with no real plan and here I was, probing his vulnerability with a camera in hand, looking at him, without blinking. And the film, I think, is a document of the tension between us. What is it to be a father, a son – let alone a good one? I'm not sure what the answer is, but I can see now that each frame, each scene, pulses with our habits of relating that reach back deep into our shared past and experiences, which is why I chose to put myself in the picture with the scene of the two of us on the roof. I come out badly: the reluctant son playing up for the camera. Again.

Endings … and beginnings

In the moment of the click of a shutter: the relation between looking and being looked at has been central to my encounter with my father. I have felt acutely aware that whenever I look at him through the camera I am framing him as an image. Once he asked me what he was supposed to be looking at when he gazed into the camera: I laughed and replied, 'eternity'. This journey has been difficult and painful. From the outset I wanted the project to be a collaboration between us, to bring us closer together. But he found the process of shooting too cumbersome, too long. Looking back, I'm not sure what the point was. More often than not we completely failed to understand each other. At the airport when I left, I asked him if he'd enjoyed what we'd done together. He replied he'd liked my company but not the film-making.

So what drove me to carry a digital camera and tripod 3,000 miles to film him? Larry Sultan asked himself a similar question about his portraits of his own parents. He thought it difficult to name, but suggested 'it has more to do with love than sociology' (1992, 18). I understand this: *This Is Not My House*, too, is a work of love. On reflection, I am reminded of Jean-Luc Nancy's extraordinary ontological affirmation of the most ordinary aspects of our existence when he writes: 'What is a singularity? It is that which occurs only once, at a single point (out of time and out of place, in short) that which is an exception' (2004, 41). There were moments in my encounter with my dad where I would look and just have to stop, simply stunned: this *is* my father. I am astonished that a photograph, or a fragment of film, is able to capture the single point of this moment and make it an exception. It is precisely the camera's capacity as 'a clock for seeing' – to use Roland Barthes's incisive formulation (1981, 15) – which makes remarkable things that, at first, would appear to be apparently insignificant.

I recognise that whilst the story of my relationship with my father is unique to me, it is also deep-rooted as common, shared experience: we all have knowledge of familial relations, one way or another, whatever they may be. By putting the emphasis on how life takes shape and meets with the ordinary, my film and photographs give creative expression to everyday routines and encounters without definitive interpretation. I am saying: here is my encounter and here is its representation as *affective* experience: this is what the encounter *feels* like for me, for my father, depicted in sounds and images. Here, then, is my own attempt to arrest time for the briefest of moments, to show my father as remarkable by highlighting his apparent insignificance. By narrowing the focus to his

house, I am trying to understand his intense feelings of dislocation about his own sense of place.

Indeed, making the film is also a reckoning with the question I posed earlier about finding my own place within the academy as a film-maker, about how my creative practice might fit the demands of research. *This Is Not My House* begins and ends with the image of a door opening and closing, a cyclical looping which seems to me entirely appropriate as a way to describe the iterative process and interaction between creative practice and research. Rather than closing anything down, the project has achieved the opposite: practice and research are inseparably intertwined, each continuously shaped by the other. In this instance, one thing really does lead to another. *This Is Not My House* is not the end of the story but rather the opening up of other possibilities, other ways of telling about place and how we may make sense of it.

This Is Not My House is available to view online: https://vimeo.com/110994606.

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